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"THE Book OF
THE UNVEILING"

BY THE AUTHOR OF
CHRONICLES OF THE SCHÖNBERG-COTTA FAMILY



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The Apocalypse

Book of the Unveiling.

STUDIES IN THE
Revelation of S. John the Divine.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"CHRONICLES OF THE SCHONBERG-COTTA FAMILY."

PUBLISHED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE TRACT COMMITTEE.

LONDON:
SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE,
NORTHUMBERLAND AVENUE, W.C.; 43, QUEEN VICTORIA STREET, E.C.
BRIGHTON: 135, NORTH STREET.
NEW YORK: E. & J. B. YOUNG & CO.

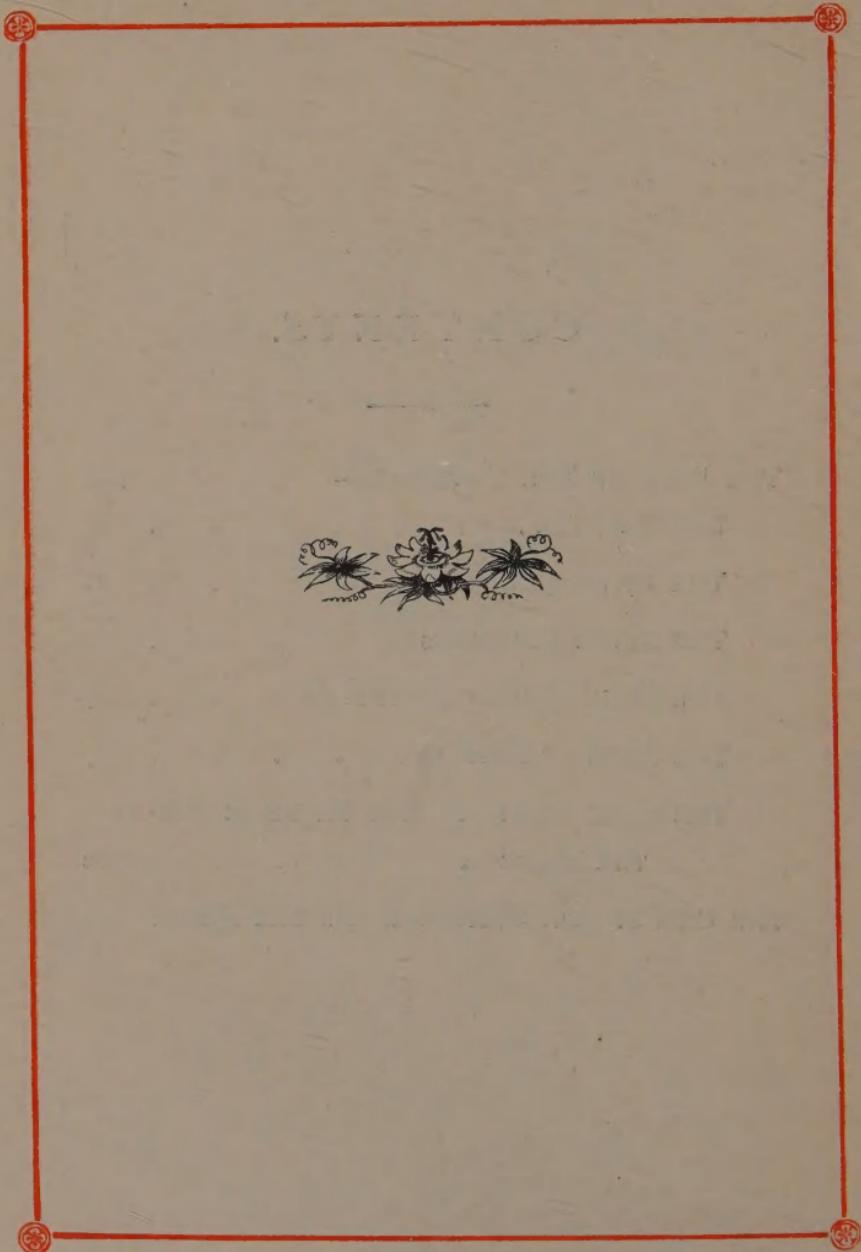
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The Book of the Unveiling.

INTRODUCTION.

IN opening the Apocalypse, the last book of the Holy Scriptures, the last utterance of that great Literature of many centuries which by general consent Christendom has received as canonical, we enter a region, we listen to a form of speech, entirely different from anything else in the New Testament.

From the four historical narratives of "all that Jesus began to do and to teach, until the day in which He was taken up": from the one narrative in the Acts of the Apostles which is the first chapter of the great Church history, not yet lived out, and never to be finished: from the

Letters written to meet the practical difficulties of churches or of individual men, in which the glory of the inner fires glows and flashes through the ordinary details of everyday life,—we come to the Vision of the Seer, to the hearing of the ear opened to the new Eternal Song.

“I was in the Spirit and *heard*.”

“Being turned, I *saw*.”

“And when I *saw* Him, I fell at His feet as dead.”

“I *looked* and, behold, a door opened in heaven.”

“I *beheld*, and I heard the voice of many angels.”

“I *saw* a new heaven and a new earth.”

“I, John, *saw* the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down from God, out of heaven.”

Instead of St. Luke’s “accurate tracing the course of all things,” or St. Paul’s opening out of thought, fold within fold, and masterly encounters with errors, and patient unravelling of misunderstandings; or the elaborate fitting of ancient symbols to new and eternal meanings in the Epistle to the Hebrews; or even the drawing up from the inexhaustible deeps of tender memory

of the disciple who had leant on the heart whose depths he revealed, we come here to ecstasy which overwhelms thought, to symbols which it is impossible to translate into words or render in pictures. We see unrolled before us a great Apocalyptic Poem.

If the attempt to construe the poetry of other books of the New Testament into prose lessens their depth and spoils their beauty, in the Apocalypse it absolutely destroys the meaning. It is only as a poem that it can be comprehended in any degree from beginning to end. And, therefore, for this among other reasons, it is the delight of the people and the children, of the suffering and the dying, of all for whom the simplicity of life or the solemnity of death annul the sophistications of superficial thinking or of pedantic learning. Which of us cannot remember some visions of this great poem lighting up eyes that were soon to be closed to the sights of earth? Which of us has not some recollection, such as one that shines on me from far-off early days, of the worn patient face of a poor dying woman meeting me radiant with a new rapture of joy as one who has found great spoils, while

pointing to this book she said, "See what I have found here," "These are they who have come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they serve Him day and night in His temple. They shall hunger no more, neither shall they thirst any more; nor shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and lead them to living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

In this book of the Apocalypse the ancient rule, "Securus judicat orbis terrarum," seems especially applicable; and also the scientific law of "the survival of the fittest," which is, being interpreted into Christian speech, the Providence of the Wisest. The heart of the Church responds through the ages to the decision of the ancient canon as to the authorship of the book, Divine and human. As to the human authorship: we, the people of Christendom, feel in it the touch of the hand that touched the hand of Christ, and led His mother to his own home from the Cross. Not for the first time had that right hand rested on him which in Patmos was

laid on him with the familiar words, "Fear not,"—when the glory of the vision had made him "fall at His feet as dead!" We see in it the glance of the eyes which watched the last light in the eyes of the dying Master, and could never, in the Conqueror and King of kings, lose sight of "the Lamb as it had been slain." We hear in it the tones of the voice which thrilled with passionate indignation at insult to his Lord, and would have called down fire from heaven,—which asked for the others the question, "Lord, which is it that betrayeth Thee?"—but could never say "Is it I?" We feel in it the large grasp, and the free play of the mind childlike and ideally philosophic, as in the Gospel; Oriental in symbolism: Galilean Jew in patriotism: Greek in order, in the sense of beauty, and in the rejoicing in the multitude of all nations and kindreds and people and tongues, with the palms in their hands before the Throne.

As to the Divine origin, we recognise this by its simplicity and its sublimity, its breadth and its detail; by the tumult of its chaos, the variety and splendour of its new creations; by the strangeness and grotesqueness as well as the beauty

and majesty of its symbols, as unsophisticated as those of nature herself ; its glowing fiery seas ; its wild beasts and monsters, locusts and dragons ; by the depths of its pessimism and the heights of its optimism ; by the terrible possibilities it recognises in humanity of evil and baseness and failure and defeat, and the glorious possibilities it reveals of victory and power and goodness and beauty, the moral range between the destroying wild beast, the corrupting temptress, and the spotless Bride of the Lamb ; by its never stiffening principles into rules, or merging persons in principles ; by its never representing anything as displeasing to God but iniquity, or anything as pleasing to Him but righteousness, anything as beautiful but truth, anything as God-like but goodness ; by its heavens which are no languid isles of bliss apart from earth, but a varied world of life and activity and sympathy interfused with earth, with lightnings and thunders against wrong as well as the eternal light and the living fountains ; by the fierceness of the anger against evil as well as the boundless pity and infinite self-sacrifice which it reveals in God ; by the infinite range of its conception of

what love is, which is the eternal interpretation of the truth of truths that "*God is love*."

If this book could be torn off the Bible it would leave it a ragged fragment ending with the epistle of St. Jude. As it is, apparently by chance, the sacred literature uttered by so many voices through so many ages ends as with the unity of one great poem, the end knitting up the beginning, the Paradise which was a solitude for two linked with the Paradise which is the City of the innumerable multitudes, the book of the new heavens and the new earth responding as in glorious antiphons through the ages to the ancient Genesis, the first Book of Origins; the "In the beginning God created," to the "Behold, I make all things new¹."

¹ The writer earnestly requests that any apparent deficiencies of statement which may be found in these pages may not be set down as intentional omissions of any generally received Christian doctrine. It is obviously impossible, in one small book, to give anything like a full view of the Christian Faith as to the Unseen World, or the dealings of God with men. The writer's desire has been simply to offer suggestions as to methods of study of this Book which have been helpful to herself.

THE UNVEILING.

"The Revelation : the Unveiling of Jesus Christ
which God gave unto Him."

GHE thought seems twofold. The imagery seems to have two aspects. Before us stands One with a mighty hand sweeping aside the veil of illusions and mere appearances which hides the eternal realities, to "show unto His servants" "the things which *are*," and therefore "the things which shall *become* hereafter, revealing essential Being in all its unchangeable depths, and out of this, Becoming, in all its ever-changing evolutions, the things which eternally *are*, and the things which must shortly *become*—come to pass and vanish away¹.

But the first vision through the veil thus withdrawn is that of the Revealer Himself, of Him Who, dying, rent the veil from top to bottom, the only One Who, living for evermore, having

¹ Compare i. 1 and 19.

"for us entered within the veil," can for us draw it aside ; the only Hand that holds the keys of the unseen world and of the gate of death which leads into it ; the only One in earth or heaven found worthy by right of conquest to open the book and to loose the seals thereof. And so, throughout all the unveilings, never for an instant in this book of the Revelation are we suffered to lose sight of the fact that the Alpha and Omega of the Revelation is the Revealer Himself.

What would it avail us to have the secrets of the future, near or distant, of to-morrow or of a thousand years off, unrolled before us, if it were a mere chronological chart of events, a string of to-morrows which could only be a millionfold repetition or variation of to-day ?

The withdrawing of the veil is of infinite value to us because it manifests Him Who withdraws it, manifests Him in ever-varying adaptation yet ever-identical character in every varying scene ; the meeting-place of earth and heaven ; the Avenger of all human wrong, the Healer of all human sorrow ; the Crown and Ideal of all human aspiration ; the manifestation of all Divine love.

Or what would it avail us if the withdrawing of the veil revealed only bottomless abysses of darkness, or unfathomable infinities of light; and no personal life and love beneath and within and above and through and beyond all? It is God that man wants. It is Himself that God gives. The Revealer is the Revelation. "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." We have found Him; Christendom has found Him, the Light of the World. For all but two thousand of our little revolving years it has known Him, and ever since He came the narrowest chinks in the simplest hearts and the feeblest minds that open out on a glimpse of Him let in more power to make hearts and minds live and grow and glow and warm others than all the light in the world besides. For what indeed is all the illuminating power of all our spiritual electricity, or all the wealth of our fireside fuel, but the stored-up sunlight of this Light of the world?

The Beginning, the End, the Alpha and Omega of this Revelation must ever be the unveiling of the Revealer. With this therefore, necessarily, the book begins.

"I, John, your brother, . . . heard behind me a great voice, . . . I turned to see the voice, . . . and being turned, I saw One like unto *the Son of man*." His own name for Himself, so often recorded in the Gospel of St. John, but out of the Gospels, only three times occurring, once on the dying lips of the martyr Stephen, and twice, at the beginning and at the close of the Apocalypse; the old familiar name so often on the Master's lips in Judæa and Galilee.

Whether we read it "a Son of man," or "the Son of man," can make little difference. The point is the *humanity* itself; the humanity of One who had *taken* it on Him; that "being found in fashion as a man," looking round on the human creatures around Him with perfect insight and yet with endless hope, and unquenchable love, He proclaimed to them and to the Universe that He was, and *is* one of us, "Son of man" for ever.

Through all the crossing, bewildering rays of the symbols, the fire-flashing eyes, the fire-tried, fire-proof feet, the starry constellation in the hand, the countenance, not illumined but itself as the Sun in its strength, John the Seer, "turning

to Him," as the Magdalene at the Sepulchre, sees at the heart of all "the Son of man," recalls the name he had so often heard on the human lips of old.

And indeed we *need* this. For the symbols seem at first, not so much to *unveil* as to *veil* the familiar form in a blaze and haze of fire and light. Not the tender, appealing, "Ye will not come unto Me that ye may have life" seems to come to us from those lips, but the flash of the two-edged sword; and we, like the Seer, feel as if, instead of being touched by His hand to life, we could "fall at His feet as dead."

We seem to have strayed away among the strange symbols of Nineveh or by the far-off banks of the Chebar, or into the cold cloudland of Oriental allegory, and a longing comes over us for the shores of Galilee, or the slopes of Olivet, or the homely thresholds of Bethany, the fields where the sower went forth to sow, the streets where the sick lay waiting for the healing hands and the mothers pressed around for the kind touch on their babes.

The mind struggles in vain to make a picture out of the symbols, and to see what the Seer

saw. For it is a dissolving view, not a steady vision. One thing melts into another as we gaze.

There are the seven lamps on the golden stands, and in their midst a priest in the flowing priestly robe with the golden girdle of the ancient ritual. For a moment we are in the ancient temple in the darkness of its holiest places, where the lights of the seven-branched candle-stick, fed by the sacred oil, shed their soft light through the veil on the symbolic forms of the golden cherubim within; and around is the fragrance of the incense and the low music of the golden bells. But as we gaze, golden roof and walls, and embroidered purple veil melt away. We are no more in the secret solitude of the unapproachable sanctuary, but amidst the stars of the open heavens, the snows of mountain-tops, the flash of the sword as on a battle-field, the flaming of fires as from volcanoes or electric storms; and instead of the face illumined by the seven lamps, the eyes themselves are an illuminating fire, the countenance is as the Syrian sun shining in his strength; and for the tinkling of the golden bells, there is the sound of many waters,

of rushing rivers and breaking seas. But more solemn than any pomp of religious ritual, grander than any show and magnificence of nature, mightier than any conquering warrior on the battle-field, is the form "like unto the Son of man" to which the heart instinctively turns, and which is for ever the essence and the interpretation of all the symbols.

Not indeed that we do not also need the "eyes which are as a flame of fire" to penetrate all falsehood and to consume all wrong, or the sword to divide between good and evil, to conquer and avenge and protect, or the Sun before which all the powers of darkness flee and all other lights grow pale. But we need, supremely and always, in and through them all the "Son of man," Brother and Friend, the eyes that wept at Bethany, the lips that blessed the little children and spoke the tender and majestic words from the Cross. And so, at the beginning of the Apocalyptic vision, this is given us.

And again, in the season of the harvest and the vintage of the earth, the "Son of man" appears enthroned on the white cloud, crowned with a golden crown, with a sharp sickle in His hand,

and thrusts His sickle into the earth, and the earth is reaped.

In the midst of the reappings and the severings, of the gathering of the vine of the earth, of the fires of the anger of love, when every cruelty and every falsehood, every oppression of the weak and helpless, and every subterfuge and lie that justified it shall be laid bare and avenged, it is revealed once more that the Judge, crowned and enthroned for ever, the Reaper, whose sharp sickle severs the evil from the good, the Lord of all the angel-reapers will be, is, always and for ever, none other than the Son of man. To none other is the judgment of His tempted human brothers entrusted but to Him who was "in all points tempted like as they are."

"For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son . . . because *He is the Son of man.*"

And thus, throughout the book, every fresh revelation of the things that are and the things that shall become hereafter, brings a fresh revelation of the Revealer Himself.

In the first vision of the sealed book¹ in the

¹ Chap. v.

hand of Him that sate on the throne,—the book sealed with seven seals, “written all over” with the interpretations and issues of the things that are or are to become, when none in heaven or earth, angel, prophet or elder in the heavenly council is able to open the seals and read the book, or to look on it, the Seer says, “And I wept much because no one was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look therein.” Was the darkness, then, still to rest on the tumult of the earth, and the ways of God, as thick and impenetrable as ever? Were only the events to be seen, but the meaning to be hidden as before? Not a mere unrolling of a chronological chart of the past, the present, and the future was what the exile of Patmos was looking for, not to know the dream only, but the interpretation, the hidden divine order through the terrible, too obvious chaos, the illuminating divine purpose through the tumult. And was this never to come? Where then was the unveiling, the Apocalypse? “*And I wept much.*” “And one of the elders said unto me, weep not, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David hath overcome, hath won the victory to open

the book and to loose the seven seals thereof ; ” the Lion of the royal tribe of His people (Who was also the Lamb), the Branch out of the root of Jesse, which was also the root of David, the perfect Ideal and flower of humanity, the eternal root of David and Israel and of all true human life, the fulfilment of all prophecy, the Interpreter of all mysteries and their interpretation, the solution of all problems, the only One Who, being in the bosom of the Father, could interpret Him, the only One in heaven and earth Who, knowing Earth from earth, and Heaven from heaven, can unlock “ the riddle of the painful earth ” and reveal the heavens, without Whom the seven seals are sealed again, and the mystic writing on nature and history becomes a mere unmeaning pattern of intertwining curves, the key being lost.

Again¹ ; when “ the great dragon,” “ that ancient serpent, the devil,” is cast out, it is “ the Man-child,” the fulfilment of the long-deferred promise from heaven, the fruit of the long travail of humanity, that is revealed as his destroyer ; the Hope given of old to broken-hearted Eve, “ mother of all living ; ” the Son of Mary, “ hand-

¹ Chap. xii.

maid of the Lord ; " Ideal and crown of all manhood; Redeemer and Restorer of all womanhood; to rule all nations with a rod of iron, which should yet be the rod of the shepherd, mighty to defend and to guide.

There is another vision of the Christ recurring twice in this book¹.

There is thunder of battle, the long procession of the war-horses riding forth to lay the world waste, the horses red as fire and black as night, and lastly one tawny and pale having for his rider Death. There are pestilences and earthquakes, the changeless heavens themselves swept into the tumult, and the steadfast stars falling like the frail new leaves swept off by a hurricane. *But the devastators are not the conquerors.* Before all rides forth One on the white horse, and to Him is given the bow of irresistible might, and the crown, and He goes forth "*conquering and to conquer.*"

And yet again² there is a vision of war and gathering armies, all the forces of the enemy, as it were summoned together for a last struggle, the wild beast from the sea, the wild beast from

¹ Chap. vi.

² Chap. xix.

the earth with the false lamb-like voice, the kings of the earth and their armies around them, all violence and cruelty and falsehood banded together for a last desperate combat,—and to encounter them the pure armies of heaven on white horses, clothed in the armour of purity, in the fine linen, white and clean, going forth to battle as to a bridal ; not, indeed, luminous as the raiment of the Bride—but simply, (in contrast to the stains and the false splendours of earth,) pictured by the homely words white and clean—not always white, made white.

The long warfare is going on from campaign to campaign. Victory has often seemed doubtful, but it is won again and again, and it is to be won triumphantly at last. But it is not the armies of heaven that we see first. They are following the Great Captain.

Once more the Rider on the white horse is revealed going forth “conquering and to conquer.”

“I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse, and He that sate on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness doth He judge and make war.

“His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on His

head were many crowns, and He had a name written that no man ‘knew but He Himself.’ ”

And He was clothed in a vesture dipped in blood, and His name is called “The Word of God.”

“Out of His mouth goeth a sharp sword, and He had on His vesture and His thigh a name written, King of kings, and Lord of lords.”

Magnificent vision of the Captain and Conqueror, to strengthen the hearts of all the combatants through all the long battle against sin and wrong through all the ages.

These little conflicts with injustice and evil, within and without, that seem often so small, and so often baffled, as they go on, are part of the great divine battle,—“the wars of the Lord.” Each combatant, often so solitary, and often seeming to himself clothed in garments so worn, and poor and soiled and stained, is part of the great white-robed army, following the great Captain Who goes forth for ever conquering and to conquer. But His own garments are not white, they are dyed crimson in the blood of His own sacrifice ; and the sword with which He conquers is not in His hand, but goes forth from His mouth,

the sword of Truth, which in the trembling lips of His followers often seemed so feeble and vain. And glorious as His many diadems are and the names on His vesture and His thigh, King of kings and Lord of lords, and Word of God,—King of men and Manifestation of God,—yet there is another name written on Him “which no man knoweth but He Himself.” Beyond all that is revealed of Him are infinite depths that cannot be revealed, that will be revealing themselves for ever,—and all depths of *light* and *love*, for in Him is no darkness at all.

Son of man, Lion of the tribe of Judah, Root of all true life, national and family, Word of God, Conqueror and King, yet of all these titles none is the characteristic name of our Lord in the Apocalypse, but only this,—“*the Lamb*,” “*the Lamb as it had been slain*.”

This name has so engraven itself on the heart and life of Christendom, in ancient ritual, in sacred art, in children’s hymns, on imperial orders; it is so familiar and so venerable, this “*Agnus Dei*,” this “*Adoration of the spotless Lamb*,” in art, in poetry, in our daily worship, in our highest Sacrament, in the simplest hymns

on the lips of the little children, that we need to go, as it were, a little way off to see the full grandeur and beauty of the symbol ; and, then, after unfolding in thought and words, as far as we can, the depths and variety of its meaning, we shall always find when we come back to this wonderful symbol that it is more than all our thoughts and words about it.

The gentleness and innocence, the victory of patience, the strength of silent endurance, the unmurmuring Victim, the willing Offering on the altar of sacrifice ; all this inseparably blent with the power of the Supreme Will that sacrifices, the loving Will of the Father Who gave His Son —the loving responsive Will of the Son Who offered up Himself ; so that the gentleness is felt to be the gentleness of Omnipotence ; the silence, the silence of the creative Word ; the suffering, the sorrow of the heart that is the Fountain of life and joy to the Universe. All the thinking by which we would fathom its meaning but leaves us speechless and adoring before the inexhaustible depths of the familiar words, “the Lamb,” “the Lamb of God,” “the Lamb as it had been slain,” wounded to the heart, wounded to death, by us

and for us, the Lamb in the midst of the throne, reconciling, atoning, redeeming; central meeting-place for ever of the Almighty Father, of the Council of Heaven, of "all the Powers therein," of the innumerable redeemed multitudes of Earth.

Gazing on this, as the ideal of Divine goodness, the self-sacrifice of the Self-existent, the humiliation and the glorious victory of the Love which is the essence of being, the problems of nature, the problems of social life, the "riddle of the painful earth," the perplexities of our own little wars, are not indeed so much solved as dissolved in light.

Taking up this as our standard of *action*, the disorders, the chaos, the tumult and the void of our social state would glide into order and beauty, the true objects of the most sanguine revolutions would be evolved, *the objects of ambition being themselves revolutionised*; the glory and wealth and might of love being felt to be always in the services it can render, not in the services it can claim,—in the sacrifices it can offer, not in the benefits it can win. This is no unattainable far-off ideal. It is, according to the

Apocalypse, an actual fact, as sure and as present as the existence of the sun in our material heavens. He that sits on the Throne is Light with no darkness at all, and "in the midst of the throne" and of all creation is Love : "*the Lamb, the Lamb as it had been slain.*" And never lost, from the days of that Apecalypse to these, that ideal and pattern of love and sacrifice has throughout the ages of Christendom burned and shone through all its confusions and crusts, consuming wrong after wrong in nations ; penetrating with its vivifying light through the ice-crusts or lava-ashes which gather round every form of Christian doctrine or ecclesiastical organization ; silently inspiring countless lives of love and sacrifice, laid down for the brothers, in quiet homes, and on the martyr's scaffold :—the religion of the Lamb in the midst of the throne, "*the Lamb as it had been slain.*"

St. John records this name as first uttered by John the Baptist in the wilderness by the river Jordan¹. The Baptist was the son of the old age of a priest who had sacrificed and burnt incense daily in the temple. He was himself the Con-

¹ S. John i.

fessor and Director of thousands of sinful men among his people. They went out to him from Jerusalem and Judæa, and all the region round about Jordan, for the baptism of repentance, confessing their sins: sleepy sins of the villages, intellectual sins of the cities, religious sins of the religious schools and sects:—soldiers, publicans, confessing their sins. Dark stories had been unrolled before him, heavy burdens had been laid down, hidden sores had been laid bare, sins of sudden temptation, of ruthless violence, of mean and crafty plotting.

The Baptist was no sanguine optimist, no inexperienced dreamer of the desert. The sins and sorrows of our sinful race were too well known to him. And, nevertheless, seeing Jesus as He came to Him, he said, "*Behold the Lamb of God Who taketh away the sin of the world:*" Himself lifteth up and beareth away, transferring the burden to Himself, the sins not of Jerusalem and the country around Jordan only,—but "*the sin of the world.*"

Then again, the next day, John stood and two of his disciples, and gazing steadfastly on Jesus as He walked, he said again,

"Behold the Lamb of God."

And with those words the joy of the forerunner began to be fulfilled, "*He must increase, but I must decrease.*" The two disciples heard him speak and followed Jesus,—left the forerunner, and became followers of the Lamb whithersoever He goeth;—left him who pointed out the burden, for Him who can take it away; left "the friend of the Bridegroom" for the Bridegroom Himself, themselves "redeemed from among men, first-fruits to God and the Lamb."

This first utterance of this sacred name the Evangelist records, with its results. When, in the Apocalypse, he revives it again, it is no more the Lamb by the waters of Jordan. Gentle and lowly in heart, He had lived the brief life on earth. He had become obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross; the extremity of pain and wrong and ingratitude had been endured, the burden of the sins of the world had been lifted up and taken away; death had been overcome.

And, now, no more in the wilderness, or on the Cross, but in the opened heaven, "I beheld, and lo, in the midst of the throne, and of the four living beings, and in the midst of the elders

stood a Lamb as it had been slain^{1.}" No more surrounded by the penitents of the Jordan, or followed only by the two disciples,—or as afterwards pursued by the murderous cries of the multitudes around the Cross. The surroundings are different now.

"I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels, and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands saying, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and blessing. And every creature that is in heaven and in the earth and under the earth heard I saying, Blessing and glory and honour and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb for ever and ever^{2.}"

All that is beautiful and good and strong in all the Universe and in all time, resting on this foundation and recognising it, the foundation of self-sacrificing love.

Then, from the order and the calm, the abundance of the life of heaven, the crystal sea, the songs of all Creation uniting in the adoration of the spotless Lamb in the light and peace of Heaven,

¹ Chap. v. 6.

² Chap. v. 11.

we are led back to earth, through tumults of bloodshed, oppression and persecution, through darkness and death to yet another manifestation of the Christ indicated in that wonderful paradox, "*the wrath of the Lamb*¹."

All moral character that truly reflects the Divine, and therefore, supremely, the Divine character itself, must necessarily embrace qualities so opposite as to seem contradictory. The Apocalypse is full of those contrasts ; seas of glass mingled with fire, "streets of gold transparent as glass," lips of patient love from which issue the sharp, two-edged sword. In all these visions of the Lamb such contrasts are very striking, the Lion of Judah which appears as the Lamb,—the Lamb Who is the Shepherd of the Heavenly Flock,—the Lamb with Whom the wild beast of the abyss and the kings of the earth make war.

But of all these self-contradictory symbols none is more penetrating and comprehensive than this, "*the wrath of the Lamb*." Thank God for the strong paradoxical phrase. It kills for ever the weak delusion that pity means indulgence to sin, that patience means tolerance of

¹ Chap. vi. 16.

wrongs to others ; that indignation against injustice is an unsaintly agitation ; that justice is an apathetic admission that both sides may be equally wrong, and mercy an indolent hope that both may be equally right.

There had been (when is there not?) oppression on earth and cruelty,—innocent bloodshed, helpless creatures wronged. Then the Fifth Seal is opened. And in heaven, among the victorious martyrs, we hear of no mere placid acquiescence, no mere gentle tones of soothing, or of condescending pity as to the woes of babes from those who measure the sorrows of time by the magnitude of eternity. Not "*It is but for a moment*" is the measure of heaven for the wrongs of Earth. "They cry with *a loud voice*," those victorious martyrs beneath the altar, "*How long?* How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge¹?"

And then the Sixth Seal is opened, and the steadfast stars fall like untimely fruit in a wind, and the mountains are moved, and the kings of the earth and the great men and the rich men, and the leaders of men and the mighty men, and

¹ Chap. vi. 10.

every bondman and every freeman (no class in all those masses from top to bottom guiltless of wrong towards some other class; no free soul in all those multitudes altogether free from the bondage of sin), all find the terrors of battle and earthquake and darkness, and the shaken heavens nothing compared with the wrath of outraged love. They turn to the whole weight of the material Universe to crush and hide them, rather than meet the judgment they know they have merited; to hide them from "*the wrath of the Lamb.*"

We cannot soften or explain away the words. If we could, we should shake the foundations of the moral Universe, we should rob the world and every one in it of the great hope of the victory of justice, of the overcoming of evil with good.

"No bird could sing in tune but that the Lord
Sits throned in equity above the heaven."

All love on earth would be baseless if love in heaven were not rooted in equity. No heart on earth could rest on a love which could not burn with fires of indignation against wrong. No anger like the anger of pity for the wronged! No wrath like the wrath of the Lamb!

Again the vision floats from earth to heaven, from the tottering mountains and darkened sun and falling stars and terror-stricken nations, to the living fountains and fields of peaceful pasture, and the sunshine of the perpetual presence of Him Who sitteth on the throne. And there, once more, it is the Lamb in the midst of the throne and of the innumerable multitudes¹.

Not now as the One Who prevails to open the Seven Seals, Revealer and Revelation, Interpreter and Solution, nor as the Avenger of the wronged ; but as the *Shepherd* of the flocks, the One Flock, of God.

The Shepherd is the Lamb. “Ye, the sheep of my pasture, are men.” And He Who shepherds them is the Son of Man. The multitudes, men and women and children, have come out of great tribulation. The Lamb Who leads them to the living fountains of waters is the Lamb as it had been slain.

It is remarkable also that the word used for the Lamb is not even that used by St. John the Baptist or by St. Peter. It is the diminutive, as in the old German hymn :—

¹ Chap. vii.

“ Ein Lämmlein geht und trägt die Schuld
Der Welt und ihrer Kinder;
Es geht und träget mit Geduld
Die Sünden aller Sünder.”

Thus emphasising the self-emptying, the gentleness and patience and innocence in contrast with the majesty, power and wisdom indicated by the other symbols.

The characteristics given of this innumerable multitude before the Throne are that they have *suffered* much, that they have *not yielded* but have endured to the end, and that they have *overcome*. They bear in their hands the palms of victory,—they are clothed in white robes, but robes that were not always white, made white, not in floods of their own tears, not in the blood of anguish wrung from their own hearts, but “in the blood of the Lamb.”

Redeemed and cleansed through sacrifice and suffering not their own. Therefore could they also bear their own tribulation and make the suffering sacrifice. “Therefore are they before the Throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple.”

And the Shepherd Who leads them to the

living fountains, satisfying all their hunger for justice and truth in the world, quenching all their thirst for holiness and goodness in themselves, satisfying all the thirst for the response of love, is the Lamb Who knows the hearts He satisfies, Who Himself thirsts for the love of the hearts He has purified, the souls He has redeemed.

There is another vision of the Lamb, standing again on this earth, on Mount Zion¹, among the hills of the city He had trodden of old, where the temple had stood whence He drove the money-changers with the scourge of small cords, where the blind and the lame came to Him and He healed them. And with Him are a multitude, sealed and consecrated, who follow Him whithersoever He goeth.

And again, when the victory is won and earth and heaven are made one, and the Holy City comes down out of heaven, and the Tabernacle of God is with men, and the Voice says "*Behold I make all things new,*"—again that sacred name of gentleness and self-sacrifice and love is the central name. The Bride is "*the Bride, the wife of the Lamb*"². The apostles, whose names

¹ Chap. xiv. *

² Chap. xxi. 9.

are in the foundations of the city, are "*the apostles of the Lamb*"¹; and "*The Lamb is the Light thereof*"².

The Book of Life, the Eternal Church History whose "essence is biography," is "*the Lamb's book of life*"³—the records of the holy and humble of heart, of the love and service and glad self-sacrifice of those who, being like Him, follow Him whithersoever He goeth.

The name of the Lamb is not indeed an obsolete symbol of a ritual that shall pass away with the sins from which He redeems and the stains which He cleanses. It is the Revelation of the inmost nature of God, of the love whose essential life for ever is to sacrifice and serve and give.

For ever and for ever love and self-sacrifice are the foundation and the life of the moral Universe, because they are the nature and the essence of the living personal God Himself and of all the living personal beings He has created in His own likeness.

For in the midst of the throne for ever is "the Lamb, the Lamb as it had been slain."

¹ Chap. xxi. 14.

² Chap. xxi. 23.

³ Chap. xxi. 27.

THE SEVEN CHURCHES.

IT is most significant that this great Apocalyptic Poem begins not in the clouds, or in the opened heaven behind the clouds, but on the solid everyday earth.

It is, indeed, not a map of events, but a revelation of persons, and of principles which can only live in persons. It rests on a plain historical base. It opens, not with the songs of angels, or the vision of the heavenly city with its gates each one several pearl, but with letters, epistles, written messages to seven existing churches, seven Christian communities actually living in the country when the 'Seer' lived, and as familiar to him as London, or Edinburgh, or Florence, or Berlin, or Vienna, or Paris to European Christians at this day.

More than this, these addresses are no impersonal general epistles, no treatises launched into the air; they are to be written and sent to

individual Christian teachers, rulers, representatives, "angels"¹ of these seven communities.

Of all the cities in which these seven Christian communities lived, then so well-known, so busy, so prosperous, so full of power and stir and life, only one exists as a city still.

The crushing force of Turkish conquest in earlier days, and the dead weight of Turkish misrule in later days, have so long reduced to desolation the populous and prosperous regions where those Seven Churches were, that it is difficult to revivify them in imagination, to realise what they were in the early years of Christianity.

Few parts of the world had a longer or a more varied history.

It is strange to recall how many of the primitive fountains of our intellectual life are there, how much of what we call Greek in that deathless world of Greek thought and literature, which is always living and in which we live and move still, belongs geographically to Asia, and especially to those western coasts of Asia where these Seven

¹ Chh. ii, iii. A title that would probably be familiar to the churches of Asia Minor as belonging to the Jewish synagogue.

Churches were. To them belong Homer and Herodotus, the fountain of poetry, "the father of history," the poetry and the history which are our living immortal language still. The scene of the Iliad; Pactolus with its sands of gold; Lydia with her Sardis, her Croesus and her purples; the parchments of Pergamos; Troy, and Rhodes, the hills and plains and rivers, islands, cities, kings, are familiar to us from childhood as the names of our native land, are interwoven like our household parables and fairy-tales with our common speech.

East and West seem from earliest days to be married on these shores, and the children of the marriage are the poetry and history and philosophy amidst which we live and move to-day.

The old Homeric days were indeed long past before the Seer saw this Apocalypse in Patmos. Since then, Athens had arisen with her glorious war of liberation and the literature which had blossomed from it. Æschylus, Euripides, Sophocles, Plato were no further from the churches of these Seven Cities than Chaucer from us, and had spoken and written in a language less archaic

to them than that of the Canterbury Tales to us; however the later Hellenistic literature may for them have drowned the grander voices. Alexander had come and gone and left his Macedonian colonies, with the Greek literature and art diffused all around. And Rome had for a century or more been consolidating the various races or religions under her imperial rule. But under this rule these various races and religions with their characteristics remained distinct, not stamped out as underneath Turkish despotism and misrule, but simply held together and compelled to live at peace with each other, so that their various elements interfused or clashed with each other just in the way that tends to produce the most vivid and varied life; as by its geological varieties their soil was made amongst the most rich and fertile in the world. It was a region of volcanoes and hot springs, lava slopes and limestone caves, soil upturned by earthquakes, mountains rich in metals and in fertilising streams; a land of vine-clad hills and rich alluvial plains, of coasts open towards Asia, Africa and Europe for commerce, and indented by sheltered havens.

It was in this focus of light from so many sides, this whirlpool of life and thought, this meeting-place of so many historical currents that the Seven Churches were placed.

The moral and spiritual significance of the messages sent to them has in great measure perhaps overwhelmed for us the local and historical associations ; we have been used to regard these communities, with their characteristic perils and temptations, as types of various spiritual states, their very names, such as Laodicea, becoming for us allegorical adjectives. Yet it is these very historical and local surroundings that really give point and meaning to the spiritual lessons.

It is because the men and women of these Christian societies walked about, and traded and debated and speculated in the streets of cities so full of vivid life, so up to the mark of the most advanced civilisation of their times, that their story is of such value to us.

The full significance of the spiritual life revealed by the Christian religion, and in this Apocalypse especially, is lost if we do not recognise that we never make heaven nearer or more

real by dissolving this earthly life into an allegory or a dream. Whatever reduces this life to a dream and an empty show is apt to melt the heavens into a dream of a dream and a shadow of a show. The reality of the life and the battle here enable us to comprehend the reality of the life and victory there.

We will therefore look at these Seven Cities before we think of the Seven Churches of which they were the environment.

THE BATTLEFIELD.

IN all these cities there was a large Greek or Hellenistic element. Most of them had been founded or revived by Alexander or his successors. There were Jewish colonies and synagogues in them, side by side with Greek temples to the heroes and gods and goddesses of Greece, and the wild and mystical rites of Oriental nature-worship.

Ephesus, the first addressed, was at that time the great commercial emporium of the Asiatic coast, with her large artificial harbour sheltered

from the open sea. Ephesus had already a long history. It was New Ephesus in which the Christian Church was planted. There had been an Old Ephesus in which the great Temple of Artemis, "Diana of the Ephesians," still stood, outside the modern city, approached by a paved road. It was by the well-worn stones of this pavement, ground by so many chariot-wheels, and trampled by so many feet of worshippers and sacrificial victims, in the processions to the temple on the magnificent festival of "the great goddess whom Asia and the world worshipped," that the site of the temple was rediscovered in recent years¹ with the bases of its hundred sculptured columns, each, of old, sixty feet high. The new city has now been for centuries a desolation, but the theatre is still there, hollowed out of the hill, where for the space of two hours the multitude cried out with one voice, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians."

The glory and the prosperity of the city were (as the wise "town-clerk" said) bound up with her worship. With the people it was an enthusiasm, patriotic and religious, as it had been

¹ By Mr. Wood.

for ages. When, three hundred years before, the earlier temple had been burnt down on the night of the birth of Alexander the Great, the men had sacrificed their property, and the women their ornaments, to rebuild it in greater splendour. She was their own goddess, their patroness, their glory, their inheritance. There was a wealthy priesthood, priests and priestesses, a great corporation with ancestral endowments and continual voluntary votive offerings; an ancient ritual responded to by a vivid and jealous popular faith, easily to be raised to ferocity in self-defence. And around this religion with its sacerdotal services had grown up through the centuries a large artisan population who lived on it and lived by it; silversmiths, for instance, who wrought the "silver shrines" by means of which the adoration of the goddess might be daintily carried on in domestic oratories throughout Asia and the world. And around the worship of the many-breasted nature-goddess (apparently more linked with the mystic East than with the human ideals of Athens) had sprung up a tangled growth of magic rites and mystic spells.

It was no mere tradition of an obsolete cult, nor any mere graceful æsthetic Greek ritual or cold Roman state-ceremonial, which characterised Ephesus ; it was an ancient Oriental devotion, exuberant in religious emotion, fanatical against opposition, living with a terrible force of eager life which only life could encounter.

It was in a cathedral city of pagan religion that these Ephesian Christians lived, declaring ceaselessly by life and word that this living, vigorous, world-wide worship was a delusion, that these gods were "no gods."

The battle was very real and close : against the popular religious enthusiasm, against the traditions and privileges of a great city, the rights of ancient guilds, the "no small gains" of multitudes and traders and craftsmen.

The artificers of the silver shrines made no pretence as to the cause of their fears of the Apostle Paul. "By this craft we have our wealth," they said. And their fears were quite well-founded. At St. Paul's preaching many of those who lived by magic arts had come and brought their books to him and burned them before all, and the price of them was 50,000

pieces of silver. The dark powers that were enslaving the soul with terror and passion had yielded to the simple force of light, awakening the conscience and enkindling the heart. "Many of them that believed came and showed their deeds."

It was in this way the Church of Ephesus began, at the evangelising of St. Paul. And for years afterwards, according to early tradition, the disciple whom Jesus loved, apostle and evangelist and apocalyptic Seer, had lived and taught there¹.

There was also a Jewish colony there as in all the rich commercial cities of the Levant; Jews, probably touched with Oriental superstitions, exorcists like the seven sons of Sceva whose spells succeeded so ill in rivalling the words of faith of St. Paul.

But the community does not seem (from St. Paul's Epistle) to have been chiefly gathered from among the Jews. "I, Paul," he writes, "the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you *Gentiles*."

Smyrna had a briefer history, though a longer

¹ There is a touching legend that "Mary the Mother of Jesus" died at Ephesus.

lay before her, being the only one of the seven cities existing still. It was founded by Alexander in consequence, it was said, of a dream after the battle of the Granicus, and built by his successors Antigonus and Lysimachus; one of the cluster of cities, springing from Alexander's conquests, which diffused Hellenic civilisation, Greek language, literature and art through the East. Beautiful for situation, with its rivers and plains and vine-clad slopes, Smyrna revelled in the worship of Dionysos, with its wild festivities and mystic rites.

Few things in history are more remarkable than the way in which Alexander's brief, brilliant career of conquest, instead of merely flashing across the scene and vanishing, proved the dawn of a new day to so much of the world, illuminating and uniting, through the diffusion of Greek language and thought, countries before sharply separated, such as Egypt, Syria and the coasts of Asia Minor¹, and creating the medium through which all the civilised world might com-

¹ The earlier communications between Egypt, Assyria, and Greece through Phœnicia had obviously not created anything of a common literature and life.

municate when the glad tidings had to be told ; Greek speech, Eastern religion, and Roman rule thus making the nations ready for the Christian Revelation. And nowhere were the various elements more intimately blended than in these seven cities.

At Thyatira the especial devotion was for Apollo. The rich purples and crimsons of her dyers were famous throughout the world. The population was of many races, Oriental, Greek, Latin ; and there had sprung up a strange and corrupt worship by means of a Jewish (or Persian) sibyl¹, who had a shrine outside the walls.

Of all those seven cities Pergamos was the most influential as a centre of the Hellenistic culture through which Greece touched the later ancient world. Under Alexander's successors, especially under the Attalic dynasty and Eumenes the Second, a noble library was collected, scarcely second to that of Alexandria. The very word parchments (*pergamena*) was derived from it. There the great victorious war with the northern barbarians—Galatians (or Gauls)—as so often with great wars of victorious defence, stirred

¹ Supposed to be alluded to in the words " that woman Jezebel."

and kindled the victors to a fresh outburst of imaginative art. To the school of Pergamos we owe the Laocoön, the Toro of Naples, the Dying Gladiator (or Gaul) of the Lateran. There was also in Pergamos a great temple of Æsculapius, health and healing being thus as it were personified and adored (as afterwards Discipline by the Romans); and in Pergamos arose the great medical school of Galen.

To Sardis again belonged very ancient traditions, flowing from far-off mythical ages. The ancient capital of Lydia, Crœsus had reigned there in his fabulous wealth and splendour; beside its walls flowed Pactolus with the golden sands. It had surrendered to Alexander after the battle of the Granicus, and under his successors had diminished in importance; but it was still enriched by the flocks of Phrygia pastured on its plains and on the slopes of its mountain ranges, their fleeces were still known throughout the world, coloured by the rich tints of its famous dyers. And still, the ancient rites of Cybele, of gods older than the young dynasty of Jove, older than the Titans and Prometheus, were celebrated in its temples.

Philadelphia, on the borders of Phrygia and Lydia, was a comparatively young city, chiefly Macedonian in population, built by the successors of Alexander in a region where the soil was enriched like that around Pompeii by volcanoes and earthquakes; in a land of vineyards, celebrated for its wines, having on its coins the device of Bacchus and a Bacchante.

Laodicea was one of the churches in the valley of the Lycus, like Colosse, and Hierapolis the fashionable watering-place and health resort, afterwards the birthplace of Epictetus. Placed outwardly in a region upheaved and tossed into picturesque gorges and peaks by the inward fires of volcanoes, and hollowed into stalactitic caverns by the secret working of the waters, its inward and spiritual world, like that of Colosse, was probably as convulsed and as mysterious; torn into strange outlets by the inner fires, and seeking to fathom deep into the depths of things unseen, through dark inlets into the mysterious under-world.

Such was the environment amidst which these Seven Churches lived; on such a battlefield of conflicting forces, old and new: of theoso-

phies which were no mild, modified Western reflection of the mystic East, but fierce struggles to interpret the mysteries of nature and life, finding their outlets in wild orgies of passion and dark rites of terror and ferocious outbursts of fanaticism: of agnosticisms, airy, light, graceful, taking life and nature and all things, good and evil, optimistically, musically and artistically as they passed: of scepticisms, serious, earnest, pessimistic, making sad but noble use of things transitory, because the transitoriness in all things was the only thing felt certain to be true.

The elements of our modern world were all there, but in crude forms, less modified by each other, not being interfused by the uniting, reconciling, penetrating life of the Christian ages which have intervened between us and the Christian communities of those early days.

THE BATTLE.

FROM the externals of the battle-field we come to the actual battle itself. No description is more characteristic of this Book of the Revelations than that it is a Book of Battles, of the great decisive battles of the world. And in this historical

preface to the Vision, the messages to the Seven Churches, this character is as clearly marked as anywhere. The spiritual life is represented throughout, not as a pilgrimage or a growth, but as a combat, a warfare. The rewards are “to him that *overcometh* ;” warfare for the whole Church, for those Seven Churches ; warfare for each individual Christian.

For these two, the corporate and the individual life, are interwoven throughout, in a way which might do much to adjust the true balance, now so much discussed, between “socialism” and “individualism.”

The messages, whether of *commendation* or *rebuke*, or *warning*, are to the *communities*, each addressed through its “angel.” The *rewards* are held before the *individual*, before him who, whether the general battle is going for or against, is faithful at his post, who overcomes in his own personal conflict : the fullest common life being thus acknowledged, whilst the intensest individual life and responsibility are sacredly guarded.

“Thy works, thy labours, thy patience.” It is encouraging in our own warfare, and very instructive as to helping others in their warfare,

that all the messages begin with the *commendations*. If there is any good thing to be found, that is what the “eyes which are as a flame of fire” see *first*; that is what the lips from which issues the two-edged sword first mention.

This is the method taken with the five churches which can justly be commended at all. With the two in which the life is all but eaten out, trembling on the verge of death,—Sardis, “having a name to live, yet being dead,”—and Laodicea saying “*I am rich*,” and *being* “miserable and poor and blind and naked,”—rebuke and warning are indeed the truest mercy, and the first notes peal out the alarm.

But to each community, addressed as an organic body through its “angel,” the message is not “you” but “thou.”

To Ephesus the commendation, the encouragement, is: “I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience,—that thou canst not bear them that are evil, and thou hast tried them that say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars, and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted;” and “thou hatest the deeds which I hate.”

To Smyrna: "I know thy works and tribulation and poverty, but thou art rich."

To Pergamos: "I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, where Satan's throne is, and thou holdest fast thy faith, and hast not denied my name, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth."

To Thyatira: "I know thy works and love and service, and thy patience, and thy works, and the last (in contrast with Ephesus) to be more than the first."

To Philadelphia: "I know thy works. Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it; for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name."

And similarly with the *rebukes*; they are addressed to each community as a whole.

To Ephesus: "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember then from whence thou art fallen, and repent."

To Smyrna, *no* rebuke at all, but simply the

prediction of tribulation and victory, as if the halo of her martyred Polycarp were around her: "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

To Thyatira: "I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel." The rebuke is for tolerance of moral evil.

To Sardis *only* rebuke (except for the tender admission that some good things yet remain, though ready to die): "I know thy works, that thou hast a name, that thou livest and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die; for I have found no works of thine fulfilled before my God. Remember, therefore, how thou hast received, and didst hear and keep it, and repent."

To Philadelphia, again, as to Smyrna, no rebuke; only, again, the prediction of fiery trial, and the promise to be kept through it, and of the crown: "I will make those of the synagogue of Satan which say they are Jews and are not, to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will

keep thee from the hour of trial which is to come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly ; hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."

To Laodicea as to Sardis, only rebuke; though still, as for Sardis, the tender "counsel" of a quenchless hope : "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot. So because thou art neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor and blind and naked. I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire that thou mayest be rich ; and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten : be zealous therefore and repent."

Not as solitary detached atoms are these Christians commended or rebuked, but as an organic whole, each living in all, one responsible

for another, every true brother his brother's keeper; moving consciously in rank and order as a disciplined army; moved unconsciously by the ceaseless currents of mutual influence, "members one of another:" *unable* to live any one of them by himself, *unable* to fight any one of them only for himself, unable to detach themselves into little immaculate cliques apart from the common weal and woe; *one* in the sight of the eyes which are as a flame of fire; *one* before the penetrating gaze of a critical world, each sharing the commendation and the rebuke of all. They are to bow beneath the common burden and responsibility of the sins which they deplore; not standing apart and saying with the Pharisee, "I thank Thee I am not as other men are," but with the prophet Daniel (ready himself for the den of lions!) "I prayed to the Lord my God and made my confession and said, *We* have sinned and committed iniquity."

For, again, the *sentence of judgment* is pronounced on the whole community.

To Ephesus: "I will come unto thee quickly and remove thy candlestick out of his place."

To Smyrna, mother of her Polycarp, neither

rebuke nor judgment, but only indication of trial and promise of victory : "I will give thee a crown of life."

For Pergamos only, apparently the division between the faithful and the lapsed had been so obvious that the solidarity in the sentence is broken, those who had fallen into licentious abominations being sharply severed and cut off : "I will kill the children of this woman Jezebel with death"—and, (individually, not corporately,) "I will give unto every one of you according to his works."

To Sardis : " I will come on thee as a thief."

To Philadelphia (like Smyrna unrebuked) : " Hold fast that thou hast, that no man take thy crown."

To Laodicea : " I will spew thee out of my mouth."

Commendation, rebuke, judgment, all based on the corporate life. Nothing indeed seems more contrary to the spirit of Christianity than for any Christian to pile the gifts of God to him, material, mental or spiritual, into a platform on which to lift himself up in isolation above others, whether in the cool cynicism of intellectual con-

tempt or the angry antagonism of religious Pharisaism, instead of using every special gift as a lever by which to help others upward. Inevitably, we breathe one atmosphere, we rise with one victory, we fall beneath one defeat, we are sentenced with one sentence. The Church, the nation, the community are no vague allegorical expressions; they are realities.

And yet, equally true and equally momentous for ever remains the opposite truth, "Athanasius contra mundum;" every great movement of progress, every great conflict against wrong, so often beginning not with the many but the one, not with the multitude but with the hero and the martyr. Out of all those Seven Churches two names endure; the martyr Antipas, and the martyr Polycarp.

And this truth of the *individual* life is as strongly brought out through these seven brief messages as that of the *corporate* life.

The commendation, the rebuke, the judgment, is for the community; the promise, the eternal reward, is to each one, personally, "To him that overcometh."

For the battle being essentially moral and

spiritual must begin and end essentially in the conscience and heart of each combatant. Love, leading to the services of love; works, labours, toils, not wearied of, not lessening but growing with the growing love that inspires them; patience, tolerance, long-suffering unfailing, with injustice, wrong, unkindness to *ourselves*; indignation, intolerance, unyielding against injustice, cruelty and wrong to *others*; all that nerves the martyr to witness to death for truth; all that inspires the hero to fight to death against evil. The gentlest Christian graces are weapons in this great warfare, and yet the severest Christian virtues it exercises are always in the hands of love.

The external battle, visible and audible, with tumult and fire and garments rolled in blood, is the result of countless interior wrestlings, not visible or audible, with the enemy within; with self. The exterior warfare varies continually; the interior is essentially the same always. The communities, the external organisations which fight the exterior battles, are transitory. On the Seven Churches the sentence foretold has fallen. Not only the prosperous vigorous cities which were

their environment have vanished or fallen; but the churches themselves. The seven lamps which once shone afar across land and sea have been removed from their places.

The sentence has long been executed. Yet in that fire of judgment nothing has perished but the perishable; not one grain of the true gold is lost. For, in the direst defeats of the external battles, there is always, here and there, one and another gloriously overcoming in the warfare which never ceases. Amidst the languid, never completed works of dead and corrupt Sardis, there were some who had never defiled their garments, who "walk with their Lord in white, for they are worthy." Amidst the death chill and slumber of Laodicea, there were hearts with doors ever opened at the Master's voice, and aglow with the eucharistic feast within with Him. At Pergamos there was "Antipas, my faithful martyr"; at Smyrna, Polycarp.

The judgments on the communities were temporal: the rewards are eternal. And these are to each one that overcomes.

"To him that overcometh I will give to eat of the tree of life:" the tree of life in the Paradise

of God, the Bread of life ; "the hidden manna," the victor's crown of life ; "the white stone with the new name written on it, only known to him that receiveth it," the individual recognition of individual character and service, the eternal secret of communion between Him who rendered the service or the sacrifice, and Him for Whom it was made. To him who withstood the Tempter was promised power to rule, to crush the oppressor and to save others from temptation ; to him who kept his heart pure in the midst of corruption, the white robes in the festal procession where all are pure ; to him who was misunderstood, despised and rejected here, the confession by Him Who had always seen and understood, before the hosts of angels ; to him who seemed often to himself "weak as a breaking wave," yet yielded not, to be as "a pillar" steadfast and sustaining, "in the Temple of God ;" to him who amidst the lukewarmness and the empty noise of self-satisfied Laodicea made a silence in his heart to listen to the knocking of the Master's hand, and the call of the Master's voice, and "opened the door," the anointed eyes, the gold tried in the fire, the feast of satisfying joy.

As in the Beatitudes, the rewards are *present* as well as future, because they are of the things unseen which are *eternal*.

The crown of life, the bread of life, the calling by the new name inspiring the heart to new service are given *here* as well as *hereafter*. Even now, not seldom, the crown is seen above meek brows all unconscious of it; even here those who seem to themselves in their humility and poverty of spirit but as broken reeds, are felt by others to be the pillars of the Temple. The door which lets heaven in is opened here in the humble heart before the door is opened in heaven.

The debates as to whether the promise of rewards is ennobling might vanish if we consider *what* are the rewards promised. Not one of these rewards would *be* rewards except to those whose aims are noble and unselfish. More abundant life is only welcome to those whose life is already vivid. More power to serve, more work to do, more burdens to sustain, more services to render, more divine communion with God, more sacrifice for man; such things can only be rewards to those to whom such service and communion are already life and joy.

“Liebe nur liebende
Führet hinein¹.”

These rewards are indeed *fulfilments*,—giving meaning to every trial of this often inexplicable life,—gathering up its fragments into the beautiful thing always divinely foreseen and intended, revealing the glorious purpose of its long learning and training.

“Denn dieser hat gelernt
Er wird uns lehren².”

What we *build* is temporal; what we *are* (which is what God builds) is of the eternal. The noblest institutions and organisations as far as they are of man must be mortal, but the life they nourish, being of God, is immortal. The corporate life of these Seven vanished Churches was no dream; it was real enough to bring forth Antipas and Polycarp,—to nourish and train martyrs and saints for the immortal life in the City which hath the foundations, the One deathless spotless Church which is the Body of Christ, the Bride of the Lamb.

¹ Faust, Second Part.

² Faust, Second Part. “Chor der seligen Knaben.”

THE DOOR OPENED IN HEAVEN.

LN heaven, not *into* heaven; not opened from the outside, from earth into heaven, but *from inside*, by a hand within; which makes all the difference.

There have been many efforts to gaze through those gates; eager eyes straining to follow those for whom they have been opened, leaving them ajar, as it seemed, for a moment to let the inner light stream through; daring flights of the strongest human imaginations soaring upward and striving to utter what it must be. And there was one apostle actually caught up into it in a rapture, whether in the body or out of the body he could not tell, who heard there words which he felt to be unspeakable and could never utter.

But this book is the Apocalypse of the Seer, who *saw*, and was told to tell us what he saw, and what heaven is.

The door was opened in heaven. The voice as of a trumpet said, "Come up hither; and

immediately I was in the Spirit, and behold there was a throne set in heaven, and One sate on the throne."

The Seer was *within* the open door; was in heaven.

And the moment he is within, the first sight he sees in heaven is the Beatific Vision, the sight of Him Who makes it heaven, not "darkly as in a mirror," but "face to face."

This is the kernel and key of the whole Apocalyptic vision. Straight in a moment to the very centre of heaven, to the throne, to Him Who sate thereon, to the light as a jasper and a sardine stone, pure and radiant, with the soft rainbow around it, the light in which is no darkness at all, which the whole universe of life, material and moral (that is, personal), gives back in countless varieties of prismatic colour, shining to the Seer's human gaze with the soft radiance of an emerald, as if in memory of the translucent leaves of spring or the light on summer seas.

There is no long pilgrimage from the open door to that central throne, no slow approach through ranks of adoring angels, along the golden streets and the avenues of the trees of

life. The first vision is of God Himself. The most familiar home-like place in all that world of love and wonder is the throne of the Supreme, for there is the heart of the Father.

None but he who saw have ventured to picture heaven thus ; he, therefore, only *because* he saw.

Dante, in his divine drama of the unseen world, climbs with reverent slow steps up the hill of Purification, "*lento, lento,*" through the earthly paradise ; then made new by drinking of the holy river beyond, "as leaves of plants are renewed" he is strengthened to soar to the stars, and upward through sphere after sphere of the heavens (his Beatrice gazing into the face of God, and he into the light reflected in her eyes) till he reaches the eternal "love which moves the sun and all the stars," and there high imagination fails,

"All' alta fantasia qui mancò possa."

And the eloquent lips are silenced.

But the Seer of the Apocalypse *sees*. He is within the opened door and sees and hears, and is not merely permitted but commanded to tell,

to write what he sees, for us in these far-off ages. And as we read and listen, the humblest among us (the humblest best) may surely learn something of what heaven is, and may also surely be saved from countless illusions as to what it is *not*, disentangled at once, at least, of the illusion that it is only a far-off place, or a future state.

Every day in this Christendom of ours we pray "*Our Father which art in heaven,*"

"Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet."

And so, when that door is opened from within, and the Seer enters, he finds himself in the heaven *where our Father is*, not far off or apart from earth, but close to us always and everywhere surrounding our earthly homes and transfused with our daily life. It is indeed a future state for us in our mortal life here, but to the multitudes *who are there now*, to many who have suffered and overcome and loved and served us here by our side, in our common hours, in our everyday life, it is *present*.

There may be countless varieties of regions, states, conditions, employments, societies, in that

unseen world, as in all the creations of God. But into these this Apocalypse does not enter. It presents to us in a wide horizon heaven in contrast to earth, surrounding and touching our earthly life on all sides, blended with it and yet distinct.

It is not indeed a world that can be described or pictured. Dante's unseen world can be, has been, elaborately portrayed in three maps ; the *Inferno* with its inverted cone winding in narrowing spirals to the central depths ; the hill of Purgatory with its sky "of the sweet colour of an Oriental sapphire," can be moulded terrace above terrace, as definitely as the vine-clad terraced hills of Italy. In the *Paradiso* the poet ascends from the first heaven of the moon ; through the heaven of Mercury, for men of high renown ; of the planet Venus ; of the theologians, in the Sun ; of the martyrs militant for the faith in Mars ; of just princes and rulers in the planet Jupiter ; through the heaven of the constellation of the Twins ; to the ninefold hierarchy of angels, the triumph of Christ and of the Blessed Mother, to the Empyrean, to the immense river of light, to the central "love which moves all the spheres."

His unseen world has its elaborate topography, its rivers, hills, valleys, flowery fields, its seas and stars ; we can breathe its air, "dusky brown," or of the sweet colour of an Oriental sapphire. It can be sculptured, painted, even mapped.

But the unseen world of the Apocalypse can never be thus sharply divided into sections, or pictured in form and colour. Its scenery dissolves as we look at it.

There is in it "the unfathomable abyss" and the "lake of fire." There is the central light "as jasper and sardine," there is a sea of glass, and again a sea translucent and luminous, of glass mingled with fire. There are thrones, and palms, and living fountains of waters ; there are symbolic living forms that recall the sculptured forms of Nineveh, yet with a difference that would make sculpture impossible. All forms of living power in nature are there, the untameable force of the lion, the strength of the ox tamed and trained to service, the human face, the eagles' wings for flight impossible to man, symbols of force and movement and life gathered from all creation, and all of these full of eyes within and without, seeing all

things as they are, knowing as they are known. And there is a heavenly Council, "Sanhedrim" senate of the four and twenty elders, enthroned and crowned. And there is music everywhere; festive harps and battle-trumpets and innumerable voices; and the fragrance of incense which is prayer. Everything beautiful and harmonious and sacred and festive in nature and human life and solemn ritual is gathered together there. But picture or sculpture would be impossible.

Something has been seen and heard by the Seer that embraces or fulfils every aspiration of man for beauty and goodness and truth and love; and therefore it cannot be cribbed, cabined and confined into any picture, in words, form or colour. From the vain efforts so to define and confine it has doubtless arisen much of the perplexity which estranges some of us from this book which we are especially encouraged and commanded to read.

The Apocalyptic heaven is not a shadowy reflection of our earth and its life. It is a reality, a new creation which we did not and could not conceive. All other representations of the unseen make it a world of shades. This is the world

of *realities* of which our earthly life is the shadow and reflection. It is a world, *the world of life*, “*the land of the living*.” Life is its great keyword. The “*living beings*” before the throne which rest not day nor night: the living waters, the trees of life, the crowns of life.

They are not gazing there, as in other such representations, with wistful longings back into the past, to the services and works of our life and theirs below. They are living in the fulness of life, at home with Him Who is the life—mortality swallowed up of life; awake with a vividness of feeling and a power of seeing (eyes within and before and behind); able to utter what they know and feel; and all they know and feel so beautiful and joyful that their speech is essentially music and song.

No faint, shadowy, wistful recollection of their life here with us is their life now. It is a *new* life they are living, full of keenest interest and sympathy, and powerful to *succour*, far more than ours can be here. They are not in the past, dear as the past may be to those who have learned all its meaning and are reaping its harvests. We do not draw near them by living in

the past, but by learning what their present life of love and worship and succour is, and living with them as far as may be in it.

For primarily no doubt that life is a life of worship, love enkindled to adoration, and ever in the sight of Him they adore, with Whom, absent from "the body," they are "at home," never for one moment, amidst all the abundance and variety of eternal life, serving, succouring, reigning, losing sight of the source of its joy.

Heaven, indeed, as unveiled to us in this book, is no state of monotony or mere passivity, no lofty region of apathetic calm above the storms of earth. The earthquakes and tempests, the tears and sighs of earth thrill through it; the thunders and lightnings of merciful judgment originate in it¹.

The continuity of life is as vividly recognised as if the more recent scientific theories of the indestructibility of matter or the transmutation of force had been known to the Seer. But it is a continuity, not merely of fond and faithful

¹ "L'oubli que ferait Dieu du dernier et du moindre
Suffirait pour ôter au jour le droit de poindre."

VICTOR HUGO.

memory but of helpful sympathy and victorious hope.

The “crossing the bar”¹ has indeed proved for each of these living loving multitudes not an entrance into a land-locked haven, shut in from all the perils of their fellow-voyagers, but a launching on a glorious new sea of life, where, when the breakers are breasted from the inland sea of this narrow world, the rest of the fleet shall rejoin them.

The rest of heaven as pictured here is far indeed from the dull repose of the superannuated monks who were never to be told of anything that could trouble or distress them. Nor is it an egotistic fighting their battles o'er again, as in the memory of some disabled and superannuated veteran.

It is sometimes said, “How can those in that immortal life know what happens here? Would it not make heaven cease to be heaven, if loving us still as of old, they could see the sorrows, or worse, the failures and sins of those they left behind here?”

That depends surely on what we mean by

¹ As in Lord Tennyson’s poem.

love, and therefore by heaven, of which love only can enable us to form any conception. Which of us who has ever loved would wish to bask in any Paradise out of hearing of the moans of pain, the sighs of penitence of those we love, father or mother or child, sister or brother or friend? What could make Paradise anything but a prison to loving hearts if it meant such a lapse into selfish ease from all the loving sacrifices and services that made life worth living here? Do we not need indeed a hope for man that has its root deeper than in any man, even in Him Who loving most has suffered most; Who "underwent and overcame¹." Whose life was not in being ministered unto but in ministering, Whose victory was in being vanquished, Whose reigning is serving, Whose reward for the service of His own is that they shall serve more and better, Whose work in the midst of the thone is the old familiar shepherd's work of leading and feeding, Whose triumph in the day of His joy will be to "gird Himself and come forth and serve." Do we not indeed need

¹ I give words written long ago in *Against the Stream*, because they say what I mean.

belief in a heaven which is not ■ contradiction but a completion of true Christian life below ; not a rewarding of seventy years of toil by an eternity of luxurious repose ; nor an avenging of seventy years of abasement by an eternity of self-exaltation ; nor a compensation for seventy years of service and suffering by an eternity of pomp and regal state ; but a training by the numbered years of imperfect work here for an eternity of blessed work there, unhindered and unwearied ; a preparing by seventy years of gradual deliverance from the bondage of self, not for an eternity of the gratification of self, intellectual or spiritual, but for an eternity of the only liberty worth having, the liberty, not of the rights of independent atoms, but of the duties of a mutually dependent brotherhood in the presence of the Father, Whom all adore and obey, and on Whom all depend ; the glorious liberty of love, the necessity of whose nature, like His Who is its source and end, is to *give*, and in giving, before and in all its gifts to give *itself*, giving and receiving in that endless interchange which assures growth and which only is worthy to be called life.

To see suffering without the possibility of succouring would indeed be torture. But who has told us that to be with Christ is to be out of the region of prayer, of sympathy, and of succour?

The old dreams of the world of shades haunt us more than we know. Our English thought seems chilled by the language being burdened by the wretched, shadowy, irreverent word "ghost," making a distinction of nature between the spirit here and there, and making it actually to the *lowering* of the vitality of the liberated spirit "at home," awake in intensest fullest life there. A faint, misty, semi-transparent shadow on a back-ground of night is no Christian imagery for the departed. Different indeed is the vision of them in the Apocalypse. They are not in the night at all. We, in a sense, are in the night still. The shadow of death falls this way, but they have left it behind for ever. They are not asleep, only their mortal bodies sleep; sleep is a thing not of the spirit but of the brain. "They that sleep, sleep in the night," and these are of the day; awake, as never before with a life, so vivid and full that ours at its keenest must seem like a dull slumber in comparison. They are not

deaf, or blind, or dumb. The veil is on our side, not on theirs.

Some of our poor dreams of heaven would be ill replaced by any noble conception of affectionate, true, unselfish life here—not an ideal of life that might be, but life actually lived here by multitudes now.

But the Apocalypse gives us indeed facts of the heavenly life far beyond our dreams.

"I saw underneath the altar the souls of them that had been slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held ; and they cried with a loud voice, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And there were given unto them white robes ; and it was said to them, that they should rest yet for a little time, till their brethren also which should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled¹."

"Avenge," a word that at first sight may scarcely seem heavenly or saintly. Not heavenly, indeed, or Christlike, if forgiveness means indulgence to sin, and love tolerance of evil, and mercy shutting our eyes to wrongs, if, in other

¹ Chap. vi.

words, the evil thing is the *punishment* and not the *sin*. It was not vengeance for a *past* wrong for which they were pleading, but *redress* of wrongs *going on still*. The cruelties they suffered have indeed passed, but are being inflicted still on others ; and against this they plead ; and their intercession is heard and answered, that we may be assured that love in heaven implies intolerance of wrong ("hating the deeds which I also hate"), and justice judgment on wrongdoers, and mercy the righting of the wronged.

If we could rise to the conception of the ideal heavenly world given us in the Apocalypse and throughout the New Testament, and the kind of blessings promised as rewards, the idea of rewards being ignoble would at once vanish. The reward for using the ten talents well is to have rule over ten cities ; no easy post, surely, in any world, or in any conceivable state of existence ; for what can faithful ruling mean but diligence, self-denial, and ceaseless serving of others ? Let us cultivate the higher ambitions, let us covet earnestly the best gifts ; every step upward in the kingdom of Heaven must be preceded by

a step downward in conquest and effacement of self.

“ Da krieg’ ich einen Kindersinn,
Ich werd’ und bleibe klein,
Und habe davon den Gewinn,
Dem Höchsten nah zu seyn.”

The promised rewards of heaven are indeed, as often represented, such as any high and true spirit here would scorn. What loving heart could find its recompense for toilsome service in being borne away into some fair garden of forgetfulness apart from all concern for those so beloved and served, whilst they still continue exposed to all the old needs and perils? What good soldier would deem it a meet guerdon for valiant service to be lodged and banqueted in some palace of peace, while the battle went on still undecided?

Far different indeed are the glimpses given us of the ideal heavenly world in the Apocalypse.

Under the altar are the souls of the victorious martyrs, conscious of the wrongs still inflicted on the earth where they suffered, waiting, expecting, pleading, at rest only because they are made sure of the wrongs being righted at last. Their

white robes of festival and victory are also robes of priestly intercession.

And again, "*There is silence in heaven*"¹, a pause in the Hallelujahs and the songs of joy. Ceaselessly the incense goes up before the Throne in the golden censer with the prayers of all saints, in one great communion of intercession, above and below. And the answer comes in the fire of the censer being cast towards earth ; in lightnings, and thunders, and an earthquake.

Again, "*there was war in heaven*"², no unreal shadow, we may be sure, of our earthly battles. The mighty powers of delusion and of malice, the Devil that deceiveth the whole earth, the Accuser that accuses our brothers day and night, is confronted by the angels who abide in the truth (as he did not), who minister to our brothers day and night. And "the great dragon was cast out" by the angels from heaven, and then overcome by our brothers on earth "through the blood of the Lamb and their faithful witness for Him."

Falsehood and hatred, "crafts and assaults";

¹ Chap. viii.

² Chap. xii. 7.

the warfare extends thus beyond this visible field. It is not only beheld and watched with sympathy in heaven. It is shared. Not only was there the fragrant incense of prayer, "*There was war in heaven.*"

Again it is written—

"I saw another sign in heaven¹." There is a sea of glass mingled with fire, and on it, as of old the feet that trod the stormy waves of Galilee, like the multitude who walked through the sea on dry land, like the three who moved unscathed in the furnace, triumphant over all perils of flood and fire, stand the victors, "with the harps of God." All the battles and all the victories of the long warfare gathered together, in one glorious symphony, "they sang the song of Moses and the Lamb."

For the last conflict is at hand. "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city which corrupted all the earth²." The cruelties and slaveries, the selfish revellings, the sins which reached to heaven, the sighs which echoed farther than the songs into heaven, the songs which to heavenly hearing were sadder than the sighs; all were

¹ Chap. xv. 2.

² Chap. xviii.

over, were "to be found no more at all," "For in one hour is thy judgment come."

"And after these things, I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God; for true and righteous are His judgments. And again they sang, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever¹."

The Alleluias which celebrated the judgments came, we know, from hearts which had watched with no apathetic indifference the wrongs and the sins.

The heaven of the Apocalypse is a continuing, a completing, an intensifying of all that is truest and tenderest and noblest on earth.

All that the true heart craves in its weakness is indeed there. They hunger no more, neither thirst any more, they are led to the living fountains, their robes made white, all stains of sin washed away for ever; and through all and underneath all there is rest, repose as for a tired child or a worn-out veteran. We must not leave out the lowest steps of the heavenly promises any more than the highest. For we live in a

¹ Chap. xix.

world of the weary and heavy-laden, and to lay down burdens, and cease from toil, is a hope not to be taken away. But never in all the solace so sorely needed is there anything to weaken. There, as here, to comfort always means to hearten, to strengthen, to reinforce, for it means life, and life more abundantly.

They hunger no more, neither thirst any more with the poor paralysing hunger and thirst of earth ; yet the sufferings of the thirsty and hungry on earth are of moment to them still. "I was an hungered and ye gave Me meat, I was thirsty and ye gave Me drink," consecrates for ever the homeliest ministries to the poorest needs.

And, also, as to that immortal hunger and thirst for goodness within and justice without, which is the very breath of life of all beatitude, "they shall be filled."

They thirsted for love, and that in its essence is to thirst for God, for the love of the Infinitely loving to fill the heart that loves, that it may overflow in boundless love and service for ever. And they are satisfied : "They serve Him and see His face, and His name is on their foreheads."

THE BOOK OF BATTLES.

ONE chief characteristic of the Apocalypse throughout is that it is a Book of Battles, the story of a long warfare with many campaigns and many issues, but always the same combatants, and in a sense the same conflict under countless varied forms ;—the “good fight of faith,” the warfare with injustice, impurity, and falsehood,—the world, the flesh, and the devil.

A most real and terrible warfare, in which the issue of every campaign and every combat is a terrible uncertainty ; in which there are defeats in detail from point to point of the field, from age to age, but never defeat along the whole line. The defeats are of one or another battalion ; the victories are of the *whole, one army* under the Captain Who goes forth conquering and to conquer,—*and of individual soldiers* ; for each battle, whilst fought against a common foe, is nevertheless a series of single combats, hand to hand, and each combatant may gloriously overcome at his own post, though defeat and flight are all around.

In other parts of the Holy Scriptures, the spiritual life, for the Church and for the individual Christian, is represented as a pilgrimage, a building, a growth. In the Apocalypse, from beginning to end, it is represented as a warfare.

In the historical introduction, the messages to the Seven Churches are each as a proclamation of a great Captain before a battle; encouraging and warning, pointing out to each company its strong and its weak points, rebuking its past failures, holding forth before every man the perils to be encountered, and the hopes and results of victory; practical, brief, pointed words, as on the eve, or in the pause of a great battle, with the enemy in full force, in sight.

“To him that overcometh” the rewards and recognitions are certain, the Captain’s eye being on each as if there were no other on the field. Before each is the glorious possibility of victory and also the terrible possibility of defeat, day by day, from the first to the very last; but also the possibility, day by day, of repairing past defeat and recovering lost ground, retrieving the panic of yesterday by the charge of to-day.

And, throughout, the weapons of the spiritual

combat are shown to be the same as the steps of the spiritual pilgrimage, and the fruits of the spiritual life : faith, fidelity, endurance, patience, never relaxing, never wearying ; the old armoury, the old treasury of graces, as in the Beatitudes, in St. Paul's hymn of Charity, in his cluster of "the fruits of the Spirit," or catalogue of the arms of the panoply, or in St. Peter's procession of Christian virtues ; and all, as always, only valid, strong, victorious, in the living hand of love, through the "first love" holding fast, gaining strength to the end.

The messages to the Seven Churches place us at once *in the thick of the battle*, showing how this is waged along our common paths, in our everyday life, what the warfare is, what the weapons are and the foes ; what the victory to be won.

The rest of the book places us, as it were, *on a height*, surveying the whole field,—showing how the battle sways from side to side, what the forces engaged are, from age to age.

The combatants are represented chiefly in three groups of contrasted symbols : the wild beast and the Lamb : the two women, the false and

the true : the two cities, Babylon the Great and the Holy City, the Heavenly Jerusalem.

Whatever is beautiful and strong and serviceable in the animal creation is lifted into the symbolism of heaven in the living creatures around the Throne ; the indomitable courage and force of the lion, the trained and disciplined strength of the young ox, the strong wings of the eagle ; whilst the gentleness and innocence and patience of the lamb is taken as the symbol of the Highest. But when *sin* has to be symbolised, nothing in nature, wild beast, or bird of prey, or creeping thing, or reptile, or worm is base enough : nothing in nature can represent what is contrary to nature. Instead of any beast wild or tamed, we find *monsters*. There came out of the smoke of the abyss “locusts¹,” but the locusts are in shape like war-horses, they have long hair as women, and their faces are as men ; they have breastplates of jacinth and crowns like gold, false and fair, and teeth like a lion, and tails like a scorpion, and stings in their tails. It would scarcely be possible to combine more elements of torment and destruction than are

¹ Chap. ix.

heaped together to represent the monstrosity of these evil powers. They creep, and they fly, and they sting, and they strike, and they bite, and they trample, "and the sound of their wings is as the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to battle." There is also an army of monstrous demon horses and horsemen, two hundred thousand thousand, and the horsemen have breast-plates of jacinth and brimstone, and their heads are as the heads of lions, and from their mouths issue fire and smoke and brimstone, and their power is in their mouths and tails,—for they have a frightful, weird, dual life; their tails are like unto serpents, and *have heads*, and with them do they hurt. Again, in the vision of the woman with the man-child¹, it is the monster of the old dragon-myth, scaly and winged, writhing, and coiling, and creeping, and flying.

The only creature taken in itself as an image is the old serpent, the ancient symbol of the ancient Jewish book of Origins, the creature that creeps and coils, and stealthily winds itself around its victims; but even this is developed into the legendary Dragon, "the great Dragon, that old serpent

¹ Chap. xii.

which is the Devil and Satan¹, "the Accuser, which deceiveth the whole world, the fiendish embodiment of hatred and of falsehood, against whom and his angels, Michael and his angels fight. These are apparently symbols of *preternatural* evil, "wicked spirits in high places." Again the Seer standing on the sand of the sea sees another wild beast rising out of the sea, another monster of destruction like unto a leopard, with the broad paws of a bear and the teeth of a lion and a fearful seven-fold life, with seven heads; an entirely inconceivable monster².

Then out of the earth another wild beast, apparently a parody and mockery of the Divine patience and gentleness, with two horns like a lamb, and a voice like a dragon, as it were the mocking hiss of a serpent, and this deceives, and works lying wonders and signs³.

These apparently are symbols of *human* wickedness. The whole range of the animal creation is rifled to represent the bestial ferocity and cold-blooded cruelty and reptile cunning and seductive treachery which may picture the

¹ Chap. xii. 9; chap. xx. 2.

² Chap. ix. 16.

³ Chap. xiii. 11.

terrible possibilities of evil in mankind. It is rifled and then *denaturalised*, to represent the unnatural monstrosity of *sin* in the sight of heaven; the possibilities of degradation in the one creature who having *personality* can violate *nature*: having free will can will *wrong*: having in him the possible likeness to the angels has inevitably also the possible likeness to the devils, the angels who fell.

And opposed to these bestial monsters in fullest force of contrast, is “the LAMB”; as if (by the way) to vindicate the animal creation, whilst proclaiming the majesty of patience, and the strength of gentleness, and the eternal victory of self-sacrificing love. “These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and they that are with Him are called and chosen and faithful¹. ”

And so at last the destroyer is destroyed—all that is of “the ape and tiger dies”; the cruelty and cunning and mean oppression and fierce ferocity no created thing can image are cast into “the lake of fire.”

¹ Ch. xvii. 14.

The other two contrasted symbols on the great battle-field are the wicked city and the Holy City: the corrupt and corrupting woman and the Bride. These symbols are continually intermingled, as seems inevitable, representing as they do the race of men in its aspect towards God and towards each other: the Bride the type of humanity in its relation to God,—of all that is meant by religion; the City the type of mankind in their organised relations to each other, of all that is aimed at by the highest ideals of socialism and communism, the Society which is “*free*” and “*the mother of us all*,” combining the freedom of the individual with the motherly provision and care for the whole. These two symbols on the two contrary sides are being constantly intertwined. The “woman drunk with the blood of the saints, which did corrupt the earth” is the “great City Babylon”; she sits on the seven hills; and her image is again combined with that of the monstrous wild beast.

And on the other side, “I John saw the Holy City coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a Bride adorned for her husband.”

It seems best not to attempt to define the imagery of the City and the Bride into a sharply-outlined mosaic, but rather to take it as it is given,—inextricably interwoven as different threads in a tapestry, as different themes in some great fugue.

In both the symbols of evil, the fallen city and the fallen woman, the essential characteristic is that they are beautiful creations ruined, lofty ideals lost, sanctities desecrated.

Before looking at the ruin we must look at the ideal ruined.

With the Woman it is the ruin of God's ideal for humanity in relation to Himself; pure, faithful, chaste, loyal, dependent in adoring love on Him, with a love free and immortal as His own, and therefore able to serve all with a love self-sacrificing as His own; fellow-worker in every work of love, sharer of every burden of love, companion in counsel; enthroned beside the Highest because ready with the Highest to wash the feet of the lowest;—all that is meant by the name of wife: the Bride of the Lamb, of Him Whose essential nature is self-sacrificing love. And again, majestically ruling, tenderly cherishing-

ing the little ones, meekly ready for any highest office, joyfully ready for any lowest service, sacrificing everything without any consciousness that it is sacrificing anything, patient, pitiful, heroic, devoted ; all that is meant by the name of Mother.

And in contrast to this, all this inexhaustible fountain of self-sacrificing love, degraded into an unfathomable void of craving self-love, into an abyss of insatiable vanity and coveting of gifts, and indulgences ; false, faithless, fickle, unable to rest ; and in the terrible decline of such a descent, from a weak yielding to temptation, falling to the devilish desire to tempt and degrade ; the tempted becoming the temptress, the corrupted the corruptress, all that was meant to be highest and purest becoming all that is most hideous and loathsome and base, below humanity, below the beasts, in some sense almost below the devils ; "the woman arrayed in purple and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filth of her fornications, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus."

"The woman which is that great city." And then comes the vision of the fall of the city. "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen." But all through the lamentations and the Hallelujahs, we feel that the image of the woman is continually recurring blended with that of the city. The spiritual and moral cannot be severed from the civil and social.

And again, the degradation of the *city* is the fall from a noble ideal, the ideal of human society; the City whose several gates are each one pearl, its spacious streets of pure gold and pure transparent glass, not a dark or evil thing in them that can be or needs to be hidden; the streets themselves fresh as a forest and fair as a garden with the crystal river of life and the trees of life renewing their spring continually; no dweller there isolated by any selfish ambitions apart from the good of all.

"There Love what she loves in others evermore her own
doth call,
The separate joy of each becomes the common joy of
all¹."

¹ Damiani, "Ad perennis vitae fontem." French's Sacred Latin Poetry.

On every heart and mind of every citizen written, not only the name of God, Who is love, and his own “new name” of individual character, all that the original creation and the long warfare and overcomings of earth have made him; but also the name of the City of God, the glorious seal of the great Common Life.

Yet with all this grand corporate life not only is there no mechanical monotony of character and work, but no corporate exclusiveness. The gates of pearl are open day and night that all may go in and out; the leaves of the Tree of life are no guarded property of privileged citizens, they are for the healing of the nations.

And the City has no Temple; for it is all one Temple, God Himself and the Lamb are its Temple and its Light; all its work is worship.

And in contrast with this is the fallen city, Babylon the great, with her lofty pride and her greedy covetousness, her luxuries and her cruelties, her buying and selling of everything, not of gold and precious stones only and purple and scarlet and odours and spices, but of the bodies and souls of men. In her also, it may be said, there is no Temple,—no Altar on which to offer

sacrifice ; for *she herself* is her own idolatry, and all her precious gifts and merchandise are offered on the altar of self.

The image of the fallen city before the Seer seems to be the great city of his own day, the climax and embodiment of the power and corruption of that age, the Imperial Rome of the first and second centuries, metropolis of rule and of commerce, the great whirlpool which drew into itself all that was beautiful in Art, or subtle in thought ; herself no fountain of creation, in art or literature or philosophy, but a supreme constructor of aqueducts for all the fountains and streams of the more gifted races, monopolising them for herself by force of her own unique gift of organising and ruling ; she herself, moreover, having at that time abandoned this her own imperial gift into the hands of monsters of wickedness, maddened, no doubt, by the intoxication of the wine of the cup she mixed for them.

“*Her sins have reached unto heaven,*” to all time the type of a Society based on selfishness, the lower classes enslaved by oppression and destitution ; the upper classes enslaved by the vices nourished by the slavery of the lower ;

amongst the poor the indolence of despair, amongst the rich the indolence of cynicism with nothing worth hoping or working for. "How much she glorified herself, so much torment and sorrow give her."

To all time the type of great gifts wasted, and splendid opportunities thrown away, thus embodied in Imperial Rome, and in Rome sentenced and avenged in siege and sack and ruin. To all time the warning for all civilisations built on the luxury of the few and the degradation of the many, all civilisations aiming only at self-culture, all societies based on self-interest and self-love. Embodied in the corrupt city and the corrupt woman of that age, renewed in one incarnation after another from age to age, only to be combated by the Holy City and the faithful Bride, for whom all these low ambitions are reversed, whose glory is the good of all, whose ambition is to serve, whose native air is public spirit, devotion to the Highest, and through Him self-sacrifice for all ; the City of God ; the Bride of the Lamb.

The mind is apt to get bewildered—as amidst a din of discordant sounds, amidst all these

wild beasts and monsters and earthquakes and thunders, these clashing symbols, and dissolving views, the wicked woman on the seven-headed beast dissolving into the wicked city on her seven hills,—with the impossibility of translating them into definite pictures or distinct sounds.

But what, after all, does this confusion mean save simply that *what we are looking at is a battle-field*, one long ceaseless battle; impossible therefore to picture in any clear shape, or to render into any ordered story. There is “blood and fire and vapour of smoke”; there are rushings of floods, breakings of seas, thunders and lightnings and earthquakes, burning mountains with streams of molten lava hissing in the seething sea; vials of wrath poured out on rivers and fountains, blood and corruption where there should be healing waters of life; tumult and unrest where there should be stedfastness and calm, the stars falling, the sun darkened; famines and pestilences, mad panics of aimless slaughter, wailings and blasphemings; anguish beyond speech or cry, “men gnawing their tongues for pain, seeking death and not finding it,” calling on the mountains to fall on them and the rocks

to crush them, desiring to die and death fleeing from them.

And yet, when we place all this tumult and horror side by side with what we call history, what is it but a rendering this into symbols not more monstrous than the facts? What is it but a translation into these deafening discords of the long warfare of the world?

These discords are not indeed the Apocalypse, the Revelation! What is revealed is the solemn music of the Hallelujahs which from time to time pierces through the din, proclaiming that through it all, evil is being overcome, conquered by good.

In those early centuries when this Apocalypse was given, the battle seemed about at its worst. Nothing worse has yet appeared in the world than that knitting of the nations into such an irresistible organisation of imperial rule by the people gifted above all others with the genius of ruling, and then placing this tremendous engine of rule in the hands of the basest, vainest, most capricious, most cruel, maddest of men, such as Domitian, Caligula, and Nero. All these images of monstrous wild beasts were, moreover, we know, actually and literally worshipped in temples

with incense and sacrifices. The stars were indeed falling into the seas. The fountains of national and social life had indeed become corrupted with blood.

But, alas! that has not been the only Reign of Terror on earth since the Christian era, or even in Europe since Europe became Christian.

Since the days of the Apocalypse, twice, "the city which reigneth over the kings of the earth" has been besieged and sacked, "made desolate and naked," and laid in ruins. Once, when by the barbaric Gothic tribes, to whom afar off she had been as a glorious city of the gods, she was stormed and sacked. Then the capture of Rome, it has been said, "struck the Roman world to the heart," that siege and sack which gave birth to St. Augustine's great book on the Two Cities, the earthly and the heavenly, which he called "The City of God," *Civitas Dei*.

A second time, when the Rome of the Popes, of the Borgias and the Renaissance, was besieged and stormed by the troops, Spanish and German, of the Emperor Charles the Fifth. "Never," it is said, "was plunder longer, more continuous, more destructive than this." "Desolate and

naked once more," the beautiful city at the mercy of her enemies, "eating her flesh and burning her with fire," enemies who had ministered to her splendour, and gloried in her sway.

Still, on and on, the long warfare rages from age to age. Wars of races, barbaric Goths and Franks, Norsemen, Huns, Tartars, breaking in on the crumbling Empire and bringing in a new chaos, out of which the new order of a new creation was to arise. Wars of nations: German and Frank and Norseman, as the new kingdoms struck and hammered each other into shape. Wars of classes, as the new order slowly developed; peasant wars; wars of trading cities with feudal chiefs, wars of kings with nobles and with people; and wars of religion, of one section of Christendom with another before and after the great Schism of East and West. Then the fierce warfare with the new religion of Mohammed; the crushing of all freedom of life and thought out of the East, the devastation of the fairest regions of the earth, Asia Minor, Egypt, North Africa, Southern Europe, in the fierce onset of Moslem conquest, followed by the slow ruin and decay

under Turkish tyranny and misrule ; encountered by the wars of the Crusades. Then the wars of the Reformation in Italy, in Holland and Flanders, in Germany, by sea and land ; sieges and sacks and furious battles, again “ blood and fire and vapour of smoke,” and again martyrs on all sides of Christian conviction, all, as of old, dying, calling on the sacred name of Jesus, but alas, too often slain, not as of old, by those who knew Him not !

Then, again, wars of classes : the volcanic outbreak of the French Revolution ; fires of wrong and oppression smouldering underground through centuries bursting up through new outlets ; again burning mountains falling into the sea, again stars falling to the earth, again earthquakes and pestilences, moral, social, religious, ending in the devastations of another World-Conqueror, striving in vain to weld the many kingdoms into an Universal Empire. And yet again, within our own memories, in the new regions of the far West, out of the sphere of our own ancient inherited European feuds, a great civil war ; a great war enkindled by a great wrong, the great slave war of English-speaking America, ending in the abolition of slavery for ever.

Blood and fire and vapour of smoke, cries of anguish, vials of wrath and oppression and cruel retaliation, earth quaking and heaven darkened,—on and on it goes with terrible monotony; not only in this book of the Apocalypse, but in page after page of the history of the world ever since.

There is no Apocalypse needed to reveal the dark story of strife; what is needed is the interpretation; and this the Apocalypse gives. It widens the horizon; it reveals the true nature of the combat and the combatants, the heavens and the abysses which surround our brief life and our small world, the powers of darkness and of light engaged in our conflicts. It reveals that all this tumult and confusion is the tumult of a *battle*; that we are in the midst of a great war, and not only *may* but *must* each of us take his side in it continually, whether consciously or not. It reveals not only a Day at the end of the world on which the world is to be judged, but a Throne of judgment, an infallible tribunal already and always there. Not only an abyss into which at last all evil will be cast, or a heaven in which at last all good will be garnered; but an

abyss, a bottomless pit of darkness underneath us now; a heaven, an infinite world of light and love around and above us now, where our Father is, every day and for ever.

The unseen Universe is not revealed as a place or places apart from our visible world, but as a society, a condition, a world (or rather many worlds) touching and interpenetrating ours at all points, around us, close to us, with us always; which gives a far more awful and beautiful and tender significance to our everyday natural life, as well as to our eternal supernatural faith.

Even after leaving the plain historical base in the Seven Asiatic Cities, Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, and the rest, when the door in heaven is opened, and we enter on the world of symbolic vision, geographical names occur familiar to the Seer as any places in England, France, or Germany to us to-day, "the river Euphrates," the "city called Sodom," the city "on the seven hills" and Mount Zion, familiar to the writer as any of our native hills to us. But underneath is the abyss; and from the abyss come up the monstrous shapes of evil and destruction, and

the dragon, and the king over them all whose name is the destroyer.

And also, continually, through the smoke and bloodshed of the battle and the conflagrations, there are rifts in the clouds, and, quite near us, so that their forms can be clearly seen and the words they say and sing be clearly heard, are the multitudes in the light and harmony of heaven.

All the woe and failure here below cannot, there, damp the trust and hope which inspire the Hallelujahs. Not because the struggle seems to them brief (their cry is "How long?"), but because the triumph of God and Good is certain, they can sing the new song.

Through all the swaying of the battle they see the victory; they know that the miseries are but the true and righteous judgment for the sins; that the real evil is not the *judgment* but the *sin*. The sins indeed are from the unnatural depths of the abyss. But the pain and anguish, the pestilences and earthquakes, the judgments and punishments, are but terrible instruments in the hands of ministers of mercy, to sweep away the wrongs which caused them, to defeat the unnatural monsters, and to restore the natural

which is Divine ; to break up the chaos, and bring in the new Creation. Wild beast after wild beast is driven downward, one false prophet after another is silenced, one form of Babylon after another does fall, wrong after wrong is detected, avenged and abolished.

The Battle does indeed still go on, fierce and real, for ever changing its ground and its shape, yet essentially the same. There is indeed war in terrible earnest. The struggle for victory cannot but imply the possibility of defeat. Not only the Babylons fall ; the Seven Churches decay and vanish from the earth ; and there are defeats, sadder than all, of individual combatants, lives growing narrower and smaller, withering instead of ripening, dwindling instead of expanding. "To him that overcometh" must imply the contrary for him that overcometh *not*. We are never safe for a day if we forget it.

For, once and for all, what the Apocalypse reveals is that the tumult and chaos of this world and this mortal life are no mere accidental transitory interruptions of order, but the tumult and chaos of a battle, the turning things upside down of a great warfare conducted with the most

elaborate strategy and the most desperate determination by an enemy whose crafts and assaults never cease. There is inspiration in this thought of being enlisted in a great army: in the name *soldiers*. Despondency comes when we forget it, when in our everyday life, or in the great field of the world, we look on ourselves as in an era of universal peace, in the best of all possible worlds, and start at injustices, wrongs, misunderstandings, as some unforeseen, unforeshadowed, quite irregular and accidental disturbances of our optimistic calm, to be ignored or evaded if possible, or if this is not possible to be smoothed over and compromised as soon as may be.

What the Apocalypse unveils, we dare never for a moment forget, is that we are living in a time and a world of ceaseless war. If we forget it, we are sure, consciously or unconsciously, to glide to the wrong side, for there is no pause and no neutrality in this war. No one *drifts* to the right side; all neutrals are inevitably on the wrong side.

“Early in the morning will I set my battle in array before Thee, and (as a sentinel on a

watch-tower) look around ”¹ at the difficulties to be encountered, the enemies to be overcome, the ground to be conquered this day. Such was the militant ancient morning hymn of a great singer and good soldier in those “wars of the Lord” thousands of years ago.

And nobly the response comes back in the latest utterance of the great singer last silenced among us to-day.

“One who never turned his back, but marched breast forward,

Never doubted clouds would break,
Never dreamed though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,

Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
 Sleep to wake.

No, at noonday in the bustle of man’s work-time,

 Greet the unseen with a cheer !
Bid him forward, breast and back as either should be,
Strive and thrive ! cry ‘Speed ; fight on, face ever
 There as here !²’”

¹ Psalm v. 3; v. Gesenius.

² Robert Browning’s Asolando.

*THE CITY WHICH IS THE PARADISE AND
THE BRIDE.*

BUT is the warfare never to come to a decisive issue? Is there to be at last victory, not for one combatant or another, not in one battle or another, but along the whole line?

Is there at last to be conquest as well as victory? Is there after all a Golden Age in the future? Will the Almighty Love do on the whole what He commands, and will therefore enable us to do in detail, "*overcome evil with good*"?

Is there yet before our race an infinite hope of victory and of restitution? And if so, *what*, and *over what*, is the victory? *what* is the conquered ground? *what* is the Ideal restored?

Large questions which must influence us all through the long warfare, in every battle with sin within and wrong without.

And the Apocalypse gives us, in a large way, the answer.

There *is*, and there is to come, a Holy City into which enters nothing that defileth ; there is to be a Garden of Life into which death cannot intrude ; there *is*, and is to be unveiled, a Bride spotless as the spotless Lamb of sacrifice, slain from the foundation of the world.

One thing is left without doubt. The citizens of that Holy City are not men and women who never sinned ; their robes were made white not in blood wrung from their own hearts, but in the blood of a sacrifice not their own. Into that Temple none enter who have always said, "I thank Thee I am not as other men are," but only those who have learned to say, "God be merciful to me the sinner." The chief victory won by each victor there has been within. The conquest has been first and always over themselves. Not one is there who says in his heart, "Stand by, I am holier than thou." A heaven without humility would be as impossible as a heaven without love. To believe in heaven¹, here and hereafter, is to believe in a world full of the holy and humble in heart.

¹ I.e. in the Apoc'lypse heaven as the expression of contrast with earth.

Yet victory must indeed imply the possibility of defeat, conquest must mean something conquered. The overcoming of good must involve the destruction of evil.

The lake of fire is as essential to the purification of the world as the fountains of living waters.

Into the lake of fire are cast the wild beast and the false prophet; the symbols of hatred, violence and cruelty, and of falsehood and delusion. Into that fire, whatever it means or effects, must pass all that destroys or hinders life; life, indeed, being itself for the living the perpetual fire which destroys death.

No germ of good in the universe or in any one in it, we may be sure, will be suffered to perish; but neither can any germ of evil be suffered to enter into the Garden of God. For every particle of moral evil or good is organic, is a germ, a germ of death or of life. For either to exist is to expand and reproduce itself, and so to recommence the old warfare again, on and on, for ever.

“For what is tried in the fires of God?
And what are the fires that try?
All, all is tried in the fires of God,
And many the fires that try.

And what is burnt in the fires of God?
All but the fine, fine gold;
The treasures we offer for praise and pride,
Or for pride and self withhold;
And *we* as far as our souls are wrapt
In raiment that waxeth old.

And when will the fires of God be lit?
They are burning every day;
They are trying us all, within and without,
The gold and the potter's clay.

But what is *lost* in the fires of God?
Nothing that is not dross;
No tiniest grain of the golden sands,
Or wood of the true, true Cross;

No smallest seed of the lowliest deed
Of faith and hope and love,
The precious things that abide earth's fires,
And for ever abide, above.

Yea, nought is lost in the fires of God
That is not waste or dross,
That we would not choose, could we see, to lose,
And say: this was gain not loss!"

There is, indeed, at last victory, the victory of God and goodness over all evil. There is the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, the great Bridal of Heaven and earth. The last unveiling of the

Apocalypse reveals the Bride, the Holy City coming down out of heaven from God ; the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. After the long betrothal there is a marriage day, a marriage feast. The bride becomes the wife. *There is something yet to come*, of perfect union between redeemed humanity and God, something not yet fulfilled in the most ideal society, the most perfect soul, the most rapturous communion on earth ; nor, it would seem in heaven, “God having foreseen some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.”

The lost ideal is indeed at last restored, renewed, transfigured, more glorious than ever. The close of this varied literature, this one poem of ages with its countless episodes, brings back the strain of the beginning. The Alpha finds its Omega ; the mystic alphabet is complete. The lost inscription can be read, the interpretation of the dream given, the painful riddle solved at last. The Apocalypse is the new Genesis of the new heavens and the new earth. There is a new book of Origins begun, a new “Let there be light,” a new “God saw all He had made,

and beheld it was very good," a new Creation not to be marred—or finished—in its endless evolutions of life, for ever.

It is often said that we can only describe or conceive of heaven by negations, by what it is *not*. The negations are indeed much, but certainly not all we may know, not all that is revealed. They are but the clearing of the ground for the growth of the germs which are there already. We may nevertheless well begin with the negations, though we need not end with them.

Of these negations, we find *two enumerations* in the Apocalypse quite distinct from each other. The *first* has reference to the present Paradise, into which, by the gate of death, whose key is in the Hand we know, day by day, since the first "*To-day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise*" promised from the Cross, those around us are entering, one by one, to join the great multitudes, "the majority," already gathered there. The *second* enumeration of negations belongs to the Future Era of victory and life.

Of the great multitude before the throne of God, now, it is said, "They shall hunger no

more, neither shall they thirst any more, nor shall the sun light on them, nor any heat." The Vision is of a "multitude," the old familiar word of the Gospel stories for the numbers which crowded out of the villages of Galilee and the cities of Judæa, bringing their sick with them to be healed, weary and fainting by the way, hungry and thirsty, scorched by the Syrian sun, the "multitudes" on whom Jesus had "compassion, because they were as sheep without a shepherd," "multitudes" no longer wandering in the deserts of earth, but shepherded by the living fountains of waters; serving God day and night in the Temple. This vision is of "multitudes," and a Throne, and a Temple, and living fountains, and the Shepherd. It is said "they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more." But it is not said, "There is no more death." Death is the gate through which those blessed multitudes are continually being added to, open day and night. But there is no Vision here of the City and the Bride. *The Marriage Day has not yet come.* The great battle is still going on.

But at last the City comes down from God out of heaven, the City which is the Bride.

And there is quite another enumeration of negations.

“*There shall be no more death.*” The Victory is won; the last enemy is destroyed at last. And with Death vanish all the shadows of death, all that caused death and all that death causes; all that indeed, in its dark essence, death *is*; death, the great negation.

“*There is no more mourning*” for bereavement, nor wailing, nor pain, the pain whilst dying for those who die, the pain of those who have to live on earth bereaved. “*There is no more curse*”; the accursed thing, the only real evil, the accursed, unnatural, monstrous, abominable thing, *sin*, which is in its essence death, is gone for ever; nothing that defileth, nothing that worketh abomination or maketh a lie, nothing untrue, or cruel, or false can enter there any more for ever. “*There is no night there,*” all darkness, all that separates and isolates and confuses and chills is gone for ever.

The other two negations are in fact merely intense affirmations. “*They have no need of the sun,*” and “*I saw no Temple therein.*” For the

Lord God and the Lamb are the Light of the City and its Temple."

Among the distinct and different negations in these two visions, there is one repetition common to both. "God shall wipe all tears from their eyes." It is not said there will be no more tears; but that the hand of God shall wipe them away.

There have been for most of us days when tears were the last things we could have borne to part with, "the gift of tears" the best relief and balm for broken hearts.

It is indeed difficult for us to conceive of any deep emotion of joy or sorrow which does not find its expression in tears. Tearlessness, here, on earth, means despair or apathy, a heart dried up or frozen. Jesus wept, shed real tears, with the sisters of Bethany. And there will still, we are told, in the world around that City of God be nations in need of healing, the healing of the leaves of the Tree of Life, therefore in need of sympathy, such as that which brought tears to the eyes of the Son of Man, the Brother of all men.

It is a relief, therefore, that we are no more

told there will be no tears than that there will or will not be laughter. To say there will be tears or laughter as the expression of human feeling *at any time* seems as unnecessary as to say there will be speech ; though to say there will be either or both in that Heavenly City might seem out of place, when we think what a range of feeling is expressed by tears and laughter here on earth ; from tears of inconsolable anguish to tears of unutterable joy : from the devilish laugh of mockery and scorn to the glad laughter of little children, the sweetest music of our homes. But of this we are sure, all that is embraced between the tear of pity and the laugh of gladness is within the range of the voices which make the music of the New Song.

Death, the great negation, is then indeed to be no more, to be destroyed for ever,—death with all its causes, and all its shadows, greater and less. All misunderstanding, misrepresentation, all that is untrue and unreal, all that is unkind and unloving, all that separates us from God and from each other gone for ever; all that darkened light, and hid or contradicted truth, all that dimmed faith and quenched hope and chilled

love gone for ever; and therefore the ground cleared for the growth of the germs that were always there, the hindrances removed from the full development of the eternal life which begins here and now.

And this leads us gently from the negations to the affirmations, from what we are told shall be no more to what will continue to be or begin to be for ever; to the positive side of the Revelation.

Imagine a community, a world, consisting of the best and brightest, the wisest and tenderest men and women we have known, at their best and brightest, "at home," and therefore free to bring out their best and highest gifts, their most individual and characteristic qualities, all that made them what they really were, what we loved in them. For nothing can be a greater mistake than to think goodness means monotony. It is death that is monotonous, not life. Life cannot fail to be endlessly varied, and ceaselessly varying. It is what is unnatural that is uninteresting, the echo, the repetition, the imitation, the efforts even of good people from good motives to seem and to be what they are not and were never

meant to be. If goodness could be dull it would have sunk to a mere negative innocence. But the goodness of heaven is of no weak infantine untried quality; it has been tried in a hundred fires, ripened through the suns and storms of many seasons; it has a history and a significance in every tone and every look. The goodness of that land of the living is fire with all its glow, and life with all its movement, and love with all its creative power; the inspiration and living fruit of the Spirit who is free, the free wind that bloweth where it listeth, the fountains of living waters. "The Spirit and the Bride say come." And where the Spirit and the Bride are, there can be no stagnation or apathy or monotony.

Look at the lives of the Saints (true lives of true Saints) and see how original they are and how different;—St. Peter, St. Jerome, General Gordon—how little what we could have foreseen or arranged or expected! Their *biographies* may indeed be dull and monotonous just because they are written by people who did not know them, and probably would not have understood them if they had known them, who describe the

Saints not as the Saints were, but as they think saintliness ought to look.

Or again, in the angel-stories, of Hagar's angel, Elijah's angel, St. Peter's angel, how varied, how to the point, how unconventional and natural and spontaneous and free all they say and do is.

It is *sin* that obliterates individuality, not *saintliness*; darkness that effaces colour, not light. The devils may be alike; people who know say criminals are often terribly alike with the dull resemblance of degradation to low types, —but never the saints or the angels. And this touches on the question of recognition of one another in the other life, (which it seems so strange should ever have become a question), as if immortality in any sense worthy of the name could be possible without personal identity, or identity without memory, which in itself means recognition. The "*I, John, who was in the isle called Patmos,*" at the beginning of the Apocalypse, is indeed the same as the "*I, John, who saw the Holy City,*" at the end, and both are as essential a part of the life of that Holy City as the "*I, Jesus, who sent My angel to testify these things.*"

The Unseen World was never, indeed, really detached from earth. The innumerable company of angels, the spirits of the just made perfect, are near us, and caring for us always. The Heaven in which our Father always is, and to which our Lord has ascended, embraces us always. In the hearts in which He dwells, in a very real sense, Heaven has begun. Yet in some way, we cannot conceive how, the one Family in heaven and earth is to be blended then as never before ;—in some sense of perfect unity and transcendent bliss, in that great City, the Heavenly Jerusalem, “descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God.”

As with all Divine restitutions, far more is restored than was lost. The Paradise Regained, the Garden of God is there; but it is no more a Paradise of solitude for two. It is the Garden and the City blended. The great multitudes no man can number are there, no longer untried; tried in many fires, and found faithful. The Tree of knowledge is there, not forbidden. For the True Vine, the Tree of Life, and the Tree of knowledge are one. “This is life eternal, to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom

Thou hast sent ; " life, infinite and never to be exhausted. No longer do they know in part, but even as they are known. No longer do they see in a mirror darkly ; they see His face. The promise, of which the false promise of old was the parody, is fulfilled beyond what it could have entered into heart or mind to conceive. They *are* like God. " His name is in their foreheads." The Tree of life is there, no more guarded by the cherubim with the fiery sword, but free to all, not only to live on, but to *give*. Its fruit is for the nourishment of the deathless life of the blessed ; " its leaves are for the healing of the nations ; " words which surely open endless vistas into worlds of service yet to be rendered, worlds of life yet to be perfectly won and restored. Healing must imply some creatures with broken and imperfect health to be healed, some war with disease and imperfection yet to be carried on,—but all wars henceforth to be wars of healing, not of destruction !

Also " they shall *reign* for ever and ever." Therefore there must be regions, creatures, personal beings to reign over. To reign, we know,

means to serve. *Healing*, and *reigning*; what meaning those words give to the sufferings and lessons (lessons so often needing to be learned over and over!) of the past (*pathemata*, *mathemata*); what a golden chain they make between the long, sometimes apparently inexplicable, and unfruitful trials of this earthly life and the beautiful ministries of the future! Every faculty trained, every sympathy deepened, through the wounds of the life-long battle, through the sicknesses and sorrows, the servings and subjections of earth, to be fulfilled and employed in the glorious offices of that eternal world, in the planting and tilling of that Paradise, in the reigning and healing of that Holy City, the Mother-City of the worlds, whose gates are not shut at all.

And never are we suffered to forget that the City is the Bride, that the union of the Common Life has its source and its crown in its concentration in the Supreme Love. Never are we suffered to lower the love which God *is*, whose essence is that it awakens and demands love in return, into a mere impersonal kindness passing placidly from one to another without care for

response. The heart of the Father can be satisfied with nothing but the hearts of the children, of each one of the children, because, in no other way, can the children be perfected and fully blessed. All through the ages the unwearied search for the lost and prodigal sons has never ceased. And now at last the long waiting is over, the lost is found. The heart of the Bridegroom demands and finds the heart of the Bride. The "*How often would I have gathered*" is met at last by the response, "*Blessed is he that cometh.*" The City descends as a Bride adorned for her husband. "The marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife has made herself ready."

For, always, and for ever, the Bride, the wife, is the Bride of *the Lamb*. Through eternity, to share His Being and His love must mean to share the life of joyful self-sacrifice for all His creation. For ever to each and to all, the fulfilment of the "*Lovest thou Me?*" must be "*Feed My sheep.*"

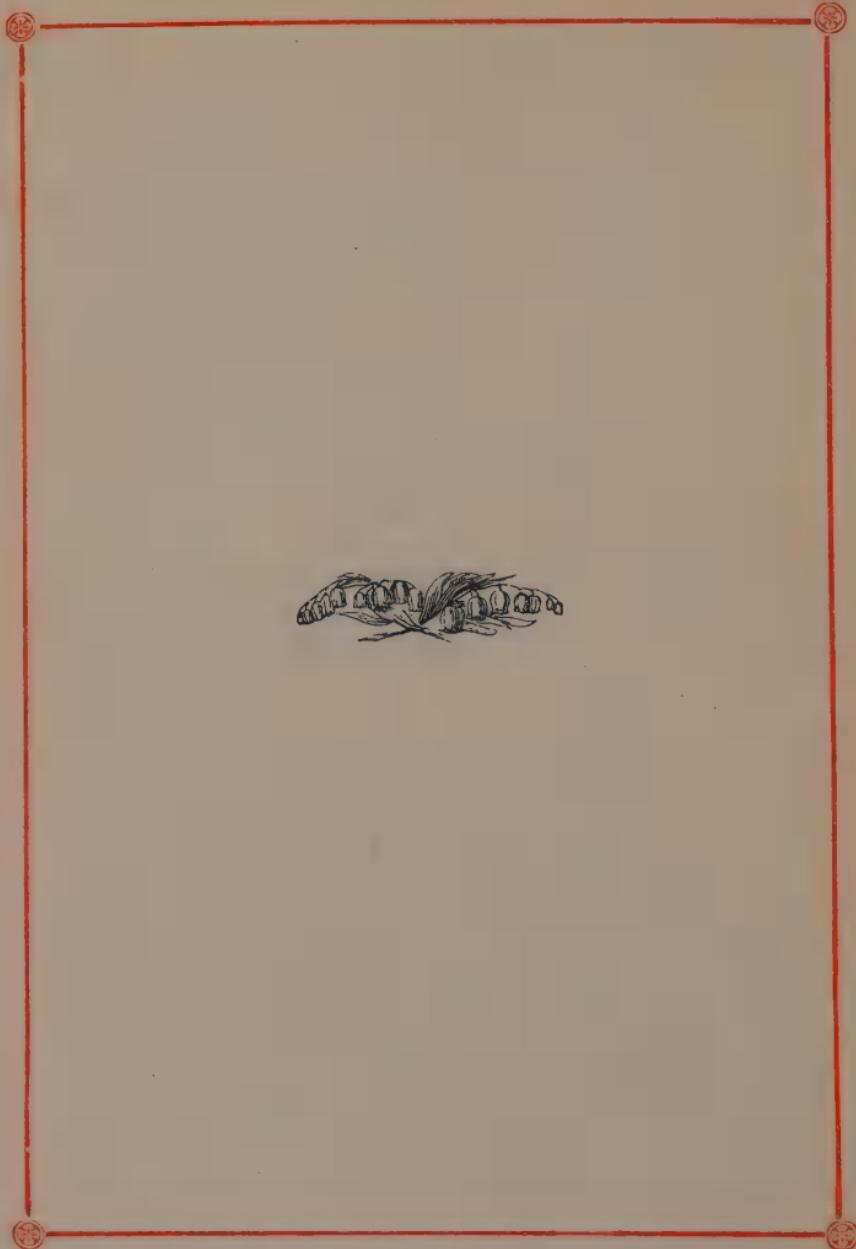
No need of the sun to lighten that Holy City, whose holiness is love, "*for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light*

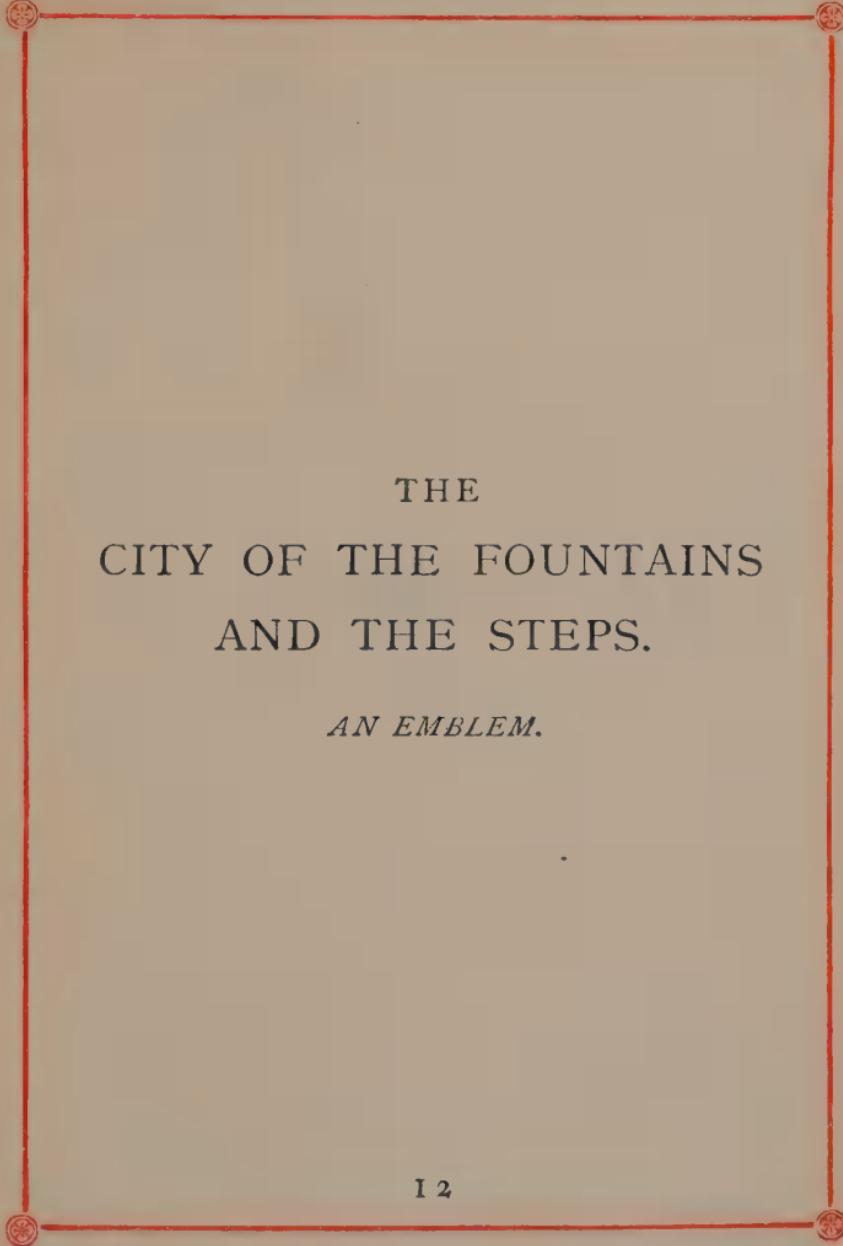
thereof." It is not only day there, but *morning*. The last words that reach us from the lips speaking from heaven are, "I, Jesus, the Root and Offspring of David, and the Bright and Morning Star;" root and flower, and perfect fruit of all humanity has ever achieved or hoped for, and also the dawn of the new day.

And shining on all in that light of love for ever, "the City which is the Bride has the glory of God, and her light also is like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal."

"And so together journeying on,
To the great Bridal of the Christ,
When all the life His love has won
To perfect love is sacrificed.
And the new song, beyond the sun,
Peals 'Henceforth no more twain but one!'

And in that perfect Marriage Day
All earth's lost love shall live once more,
All lack and loss shall pass away,
And all find all not found before;
Till all the worlds shall live and glow
In that great Love's great overflow."





THE
CITY OF THE FOUNTAINS
AND THE STEPS.

AN EMBLEM.



*THE CITY OF THE FOUNTAINS AND THE
STEPS.*

IT was a dream¹; with the usual tangle and confusion of a dream; things new and old, familiar and strange, intermingled, yet nothing surprising any one; a dream about the City which hath foundations, the City in which we dwell, which belongs to us, to which we belong; and yet it seemed as if I were one of a band of pilgrims beholding it for the first time. We had come to it, it seemed, from far-off lands, on pilgrimage from foreign cities, whose stateliest buildings were modelled from its architecture, whose most solemn music was an echo of its chants; from wild mountain ranges, from lonely moorlands, from rugged sea-coasts, where the dwellers scarcely knew what a city meant. Yet to all of us, the city had a relationship and a

¹ The scenery of the parable is taken from the city of Rome, as any one who knows Rome will see.

familiar significance. It was the mother-city of us all. We had heard of it, looked towards it, dreamed of it all our lives. But as we thus beheld and entered it, perhaps not one of us found it what we should have expected, partly because it was in some way so much like what we had already known and experienced; partly because it was so unlike anything of which we had dreamed.

It had indeed gates, through which, by right of citizenship, we entered; and around it, or, at least, around some portion of it, were walls.

But the walls were not continuous, or of the same date or construction. Some of them were archaic or very ancient, of huge uncemented stones, enclosing little spaces as of a smaller and earlier city. Some had been transformed into peaceful terraced walks for the inhabitants, dismantled of their artillery; the deep defensive moats drained of water and changed into groves and shrubberies. In some places the city lay quite open, unwalled, to the surrounding country; partly it seemed because the old walls had crumbled away, or been broken down; partly because the city had grown beyond them,

straying in irregular groups of houses, gardens, palaces, and workshops for toiling men, into the fields beyond.

The City was built on many hills, climbing their slopes in winding lanes and alleys, or from one broad terrace to another, crowning their crests with temples and palaces, or with forests of ilex, cypress, and pine, reached by steep avenues bordered with trees, or by broad flights of stately steps.

There were places within its precincts where it scarcely seemed a city at all, but rather a paradise planted with every tree that is pleasant to the sight or good for food, musical with the rush of rivers of life, and fresh with the coolness of crystal pools and lakes, mirroring the beauty of its glades, and the golden sun-tinted walls of its dwellings.

But this did not surprise us so much. We all knew that our mother-City, the Holy City of our visions and our dreams, was also a paradise, the garden of the childhood of our race blended therein with the rich and varied organisation, "the solemn troops and sweet societies" of its maturity. Nor were we altogether unprepared

to find there, not only shrines and temples of worship, but signs and places of ordinary daily work ; human edifices we knew must be constructed from without by patient human hands, however it may be inspired from within. Building, not growing, is the symbol, on the earthly side, of the increase of human cities. Whenever the history of the Holy City is touched on its higher side, it soon glides subtly into another symbol ; the building together of the City becomes the organic growth of the Body ; the city with the walls of precious stones dissolves into the Bride clothed in pure raiment clean and white.

We were not therefore altogether surprised to see the scaffolding of unfinished buildings in the city, and to hear the ring of the axe and the hammer. For the city was indeed always growing ; chiefly because its multitudes were multiplying ; but also because its earlier forms and modes were often changing. Some of the old Sacred Ways of its pomps and processions had grown too narrow ; some of its beautiful structures had perished in ancient or modern strife, and had to be rebuilt, not often precisely on the old sites or in the ancient style.

There were not only temples, palaces, triumphal arches, and imperial gates of entrance ; there was the cell of the solitary student or artist thinking out in secret the thought which was to be the joy and help of all ; there were the workshops where companies of busy toilers worked out together the silent thought of the thinkers ; there were unfinished buildings noisy with the clang of the builder's tools.

And also, more to our surprise, there were ruins ; the "old order" even in this sacred city not always "giving place to new" without regret or pain ; ruins on some of which were traces not only of the soft, slow touch of crumbling time, but of the rough strokes of violence and strife.

In what then was this city supremely the Holy City, the city which hath the foundations, whose Builder and Maker, through whatever human touches, is more than human ?

Others might find and give other answers to the question. To me gradually two characteristic features stood clearly out from the rest as more essentially distinctive : its *fountains* and its *steps*.

Fountains: not merely springing upward in little decorative jets, and falling in gentle sprinkles of spray, but dashing, rushing, as rivers, down its steepest heights, through the crowded market-places, in its deepest hollows,

“Dashing and flashing, and splashing and clashing,
And so never ending, but always descending.”

And Steps: here and there it might be, as in other mountain cities, creeping and winding up in narrow, rocky stairs, among the tall crowded houses or between the vineyard walls; but, characteristically, in this city, conquering the hills in broad and stately flights, crowned by palaces and temples, or by groves of cypress and pine.

The City of the Fountains:—although, in one sense, they were not fountains native to the city. Their sources were not in the city or in any of its hills; their sources were in the depths of the everlasting hills which stood round about the city, blue and shining in “the land of the far distances.” For the city itself was but a fragment and a threshold of the City, unseen and eternal, which is universal because it is heavenly, as the heavens encompassing the earth.

But yet the waters gushed forth as crystal-clear, as cold and pure as when they first burst up from the inner depths. Every spring, indeed, through whatever channel it breaks through to the light, from the deepest subterranean lakes, or from some gravelly storehouse nearer the surface, must have its birth from the inexhaustible ocean and the boundless heavens. Thus, through whatever aqueducts and channels these living waters came from afar, in the City they burst forth with the life of springs new-born from the brow of the mountains, with the power and rush of streams which have exhaustless depths behind and beneath them. On the heights they burst forth wild and free; they dashed down the hill-sides in torrents and cataracts, plunging and plashing into deep cool pools in the valleys and hollows below. They darted up like watery trees of spray in the gardens, dropping into the flower cups and cooling the air; they sprang like silvery, living lilies in the palace courts, falling with the sound of silver bells back into their marble basins. In the market-places they rippled and sparkled in the stony reservoirs for the common uses of toiling

men and women ; in the rocky vaults of the ancient baths they flowed deep and cold and bracing to give new vigour to the limbs of weary men : in quiet little runnels they trickled near every home, dropping into little drinking-cups for the children, or into lowly troughs within reach of the tired beasts. Everywhere, through all the din or hum of toil as through the musical tones of worship, flowed the sound of many waters, from the rush of the mighty river to the bubbling and trickling of the tiny spring.

In all the City no one need ever know the anguish of thirst. In the hardest winter, in the driest summer, those inexhaustible fountains ever flowed, from depths too deep for any frost to freeze or any sun to scorch ; pure, from the depth of their source, from the ceaseless swiftness of their flow, from the power of their life ! They were free to all, ready in their sparkling beauty for the humblest uses, lavishly abundant for the poorest, priceless for the richest. The wealthy might receive them in costly translucent alabaster ; this could not make them more precious. Art might pour them through sculptured urns of nymph or angel, or decorate their resting-

places with her most delicate devices ; it could not add to their grace. All that men could do to welcome and honour the priceless gift could but show their gratitude, but could never enhance its value.

The City of the Fountains where none need ever thirst ; this was the city of my dream.

And also the City of the Steps ; because it was a city of many hills, seven or seventy or seventy times seven.

Always those hills drew heart and feet upward. If the toiling and the resting had to be often in the valleys, yet always the hills were there, lifted up, lifting upward, from the dull monotony of the levels, from the stagnant air of the hollows to the breezes of the uplands, to the wide vision of the summits ; never suffering those who would heed their teaching to rest content with the grooves of daily routine, to be bounded by the narrow horizons of the lowlands, to forget the everlasting hills where the fountains rise, or the boundless heavens whence they flow.

Everywhere hills ; and everywhere Steps to mount them. The steep and narrow rocky stair, close to the lowliest homes, up which eager feet

might climb alone to some solitary height. The broad flight wide enough for all, where the strong might help the weak upward ; each step low enough for the first efforts of baby feet, or for the last tottering of limbs weary with long climbing ; yet the whole flight reaching from depths to heights which might task the strength of the most vigorous.

At the top of some of the Steps, gardens, shady wildernesses of greenery, dropping wells, cool basins and pools of living water, fragrant glades and sunny fields of sweet wild flowers, abundant and free to all.

Crowning the broad terrace at the end of another stately Stair, a glorious temple, an *Ara cæli*, and within it avenues and forests of marble columns, many-coloured and translucent, the spoils of vanquished and forgotten gods gathered around the memory and the presence of Him who became a little child and lived, the Son of man, and as man died for man, manifesting thus for ever that to God the dearest and most sacred temple in the universe is man, and to man the dearest and most ardent love he can ever know is that in the heart of God.

In that Altar of Heaven which is the Altar of Sacrifice, in that Church of the manger-cradle and the Cross, ended one golden stair of sun-tinted steps, reaching from earth to heaven; where the weary rested in the pauses of the climbing; where the mothers led the little children on and up; which the strongest could only climb like the feeblest, step by step.

Again another royal Stair, broad and high, ending neither in garden nor temple, but in an open space, roofed and crowned by heaven itself, open to the wonders of dawn and sunset, to the winds of heaven, to the wide vision of the far-off azure mountains; and at night open to the wider vision of the unveiled heavens, with the starry multitudes no man can number of the worlds above.

This was my dream; nor is the interpretation hard to find.

The City of the Fountains and the Steps. Whatever else our Holy City is or is not, this it is, every day, and for ever.

The City of the Fountains, whose waters never fail, where none need thirst.

The City of the Steps, whose highest heights,

and the steps leading to them, are open to all ; where none need rest on any but the loftiest levels ; the City of boundless hope and endless progress, whose fountains flow from the Fountain of all life, whose loftiest heights are the threshold of the Father's house.

The City of the Fountains and the Steps ; because the City of the Living God.

THE END.

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A022413

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